Rural local government and state politics in Bangladesh

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SUMMARY

Decentralization has become fashionable in governmental development of the third world. Theoretically, it is the shift of sovereign responsibilities that includes the planning, financing and management of certain public functions to field units of government agencies, subordinate units or levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, or area-wide regional or functional authorities. Unfortunately, Bangladesh became dysfunctional due to rampant political corruption and successive political crises since its independence. Every regime has formed a local government commission under different names, without giving much real effort to decentralising their powers to the local level. Accordingly, every regime has accused their predecessors of uncontrolled distortion. The post-liberation experience of the local government (LG) of Bangladesh suggests that the national government uses the local government bodies to strengthen its own power base in the name of decentralization. The present research asks whether the policy and the formation of different structures can achieve decentralisation. It engages in a number of theoretical, methodological and empirical debates on rural local government institutions. The history of LG in Bangladesh can be characterised as a British-invented and Pakistani-installed centrally controlled local hierarchical system. Thus, because of extreme political corruption and violence in every sphere of Bangladesh, the radical potential of civil society organisations is being appropriated and they are being used to fill gaps in service delivery, allowing the state to withdraw, which is justified by 'roll-back' neoliberalism. However, this thesis argues that the restoration of law and order and assurance of transparency are prerequisites of efficient local government. Again, endorsing the traditional informal institutions can reduce the pressure on government in different affairs like dispute resolution, social awareness, health and safety and so on. In addition, delegating responsibility for service provision to other quarters like NGOs and civil society can help to address the development concerns of the people, as well as capacity-building in local level institutions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AL	Awami League
APO	Assistant Project Officer
BARD	Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BKSAL	Bangladesh Krishok Sromik Awami League
BLAST	Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
CARE	CARE International - Bangladesh
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
CS	Capacity Strengthening
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DDLG	Deputy Director of Local Government
DG	Director General
DTL	District Team Leader
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GO	Government Order
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HLS	Household Livelihood Security
IDC	Income Diversification Component
IGA	Income Generating Activity

IMF	International Monetary Fund
JP	Jatiya Party
JSD	Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal
KII	Key Informant Interview
LG	Local Government
LGD	Local Government Division
LGED	Local Government Engineering Department
LGI	Local Government Institution
MIE	Monitoring, Inspection and Evaluation
MLGRD&C	Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperative
MP	Member of Parliament
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non Government Organisation
PFRP	Post-Flood Rehabilitation Project
PIO	Project Implementation Officer
PMC	Project Management Committee
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategic Plan
RED	Research, Evaluation and Development
RMA	Road Maintenance Association
RMC	Rural Maintenance Component
RMP	Rural Maintenance Programme
R&P	Research and Partnering

SP	Police Superintendent
SWO	Social Welfare Officer
TDCC	Thana Development Coordination Committee
TERAC	Terrorist Extortionist Resistance Action Committee
TO	Technical Officer
TQM	Total Quality Management
UDCC	Upazila Development Coordination Committee
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNO	Upazilla *Nirbahi* Officer
UP	Union *Parishad*
US	United States
VDP	Village Defence Party
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
VGF	Vulnerable Group Feeding
WAO	Women Affairs Officer
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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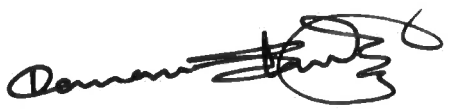
Signed, 

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Chapter One

Statement of the Problem

INTRODUCTION

Decentralisation has become fashionable in the development of third world governance. It strives to restructure authority, responsibility and financial resources for providing public services among different levels of government. It involves a shift of sovereign responsibilities that includes the planning, financing and management of certain public functions to field units of government agencies, subordinate units or levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, or area-wide regional or functional authorities. But the post-liberation experience of the local government (LG) of Bangladesh prescribes a reverse meaning of this statement. Panday (2005) questions what happens at the local level when the national government uses the local government bodies to strengthen its own power base in the name of Decentralisation. Barenstein (2000) argues in his seminal paper that, although state policy is encouraging the Decentralisation process, power and decisions at the lowest unit of local government are still governed and conditioned by central politics, especially by the two major political parties in Bangladesh. This gives rise to another supplementary question: *is local government self government, or is it a creature of the state*? McEwan (2003) elucidates a more precise answer. She argues that there is a trend in promoting local government in two ways: negatively as a withdrawal of the state, or as a potentially radical model of good governance, signalling a shift from 'local government' (the power to govern) to 'local governance' (the act of governing). But, unfortunately, in the case of Bangladesh, 'local government' is more dominant and, in practice, a shift of central government from the power to govern is yet a dream. There has so far been no guarantee of true local government, irrespective of the regime in power. All the governments so far have, more or less, practised a decentralised structure of administration as a very efficient tool to centralise power.

The counter decentralisation process of Bangladesh is elucidated in Chapter 2. Here, in order to maintain the flow of the discussion, I provide some facts in brief. It is only 36 years ago that Bangladesh earned its freedom from Pakistan through bloodshed. In the last couple of hundred years the Mughals, the British and the Pakistanis ruled the country. During those times, the power structure was designed to ensure obedience at the local level. In 1962 elected local bodies were installed at the Union Parishad (UP) level but power was never devolved from the centre. There were no major changes of the local

government in first few years after the liberation other than the renaming of institutions. However, local government has experienced a new dimension since independence in 1971. In newly independent Bangladesh, democracy was politicised and exploited by successive regimes (Lifschultz, 1979). Peiris (1998) identifies political conflicts in Bangladesh since its freedom. He notices how the regimes used those conflicts to accrue power and 'unearned' money as personal wealth. Siddiqui (1996) suggests that pressure on the government to decentralise power came from the aid donors. Different political regimes strove to accommodate both external pressures, especially from the donors, and their own desire to centralise power, while launching many policy measures in the name of 'decentralisation'. Jahan (2004) and Riaz (2005, 2006) discuss the recent patterns of political centralisation in Bangladesh. Political desire is one of the prerequisites for decentralisation but this was completely absent among all of the country's governments. This political culture has gradually weakened the local government institutions of Bangladesh in the last 36 years.

Although modern local government in Bangladesh has a history dating back to the British period, a substantial change in its formation has been caused by the globalisation of decentralisation (see Chapter 3). It is important to mention that in the last two decades especially, a structural form of decentralisation has been observable in developing countries all over the world. Lee (2002) examines 18 Asian countries and underscores that democratisation here was not a result of economic development, economic crisis, religious and political culture, nor even de-colonisation; instead, it has been political protests that have led to democratisation in Asian countries. In the case of Bangladesh, the popular uprising against Ershad in 1990 and the general election of 1996 under a caretaker government are two significant examples in this regard. In addition, the survivals of informal local government institutions like *salish* and *samaj* open up some new thoughts to explore the local government of Bangladesh.

The reality of continuous political centralisation has emphasised patron-client linkages in different service delivery provision at the local level. The increasing involvement of NGOs in service delivery is an attempt to counteract this. The Rural Maintenance Programme (RMP) of CARE Bangladesh is an example in this regard (see Chapter 5). The RMP was established to ensure the sustainable development of the livelihoods of destitute women in rural Bangladesh and local government institutions were involved in

this process as a further guarantee. As a former employee of the programme, I have personally observed the patron-clientalism, poor institutional set-up, politicisation, ambiguity and so on at the rural level.

Some interim conclusions:

- There is no universal local government system, so study of differentiation in space is important;
- Local government is influenced by different internal and external factors under successive political regimes;
- Sustainable local government is a discourse of spatial and temporal continuum, in the analysis of which geographers have skills to contribute.

Having elucidated some initial thoughts on decentralisation and counter-decentralisation drawn from the global experience, the following paragraphs first outline the objectives, methodology and structure of the thesis and then discuss some of the negative aspects of national politics of Bangladesh, along with an account of external influences, NGO movements and the rationale of the study. Finally, the chapter concludes with the scope of this research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this research project are to:

- Explore the historical development of local government in Bangladesh;
- Identify the hidden political goals of different governments in decentralizing the local government of Bangladesh;
- Review global Decentralisation theories focusing on the Bangladesh context;
- Analyse and explain the existing local government structure of rural Bangladesh.
- Provide a general understanding of Decentralisation issues of rural Bangladesh in the light of political geography;
- Investigate the existing loopholes (capacity of local bodies, the gender situation, negative political patronage) of local government in Bangladesh;
- Analyse the role of civil society and NGOs in the development of Bangladeshi local government;

- Explore the potential and opportunities to strengthen the local government of Bangladesh.

METHODOLOGY

The objectives of this research have two major focuses: firstly, reviewing the evolution of the Decentralisation practices in Bangladesh in light of the political goals of the former and present governments and, secondly, an evaluation of the present rural local government institutions' capacity to implement Decentralisation successfully in Bangladesh. The former part will be elucidated with the help of a literature review and the latter will be viewed through both literature and field experiences. The field experiences comprise the qualitative information collected from different groups affiliated with local government. The data have been obtained from the RMP[1] of CARE International Bangladesh. The RMP has operated for around a decade to improve the capacity of the LG institutes of rural Bangladesh and in January 2005 they conducted a study of the capacity assessment of LG institutions in their programme area. I participated in that study as a Technical Officer-Monitoring of the largest region of the RMP. The study strove to collect qualitative information from all the groups interacting with LG institutions. The study was designed in a way that the multiple groups interacting in a common area from different levels could explain their thoughts and experiences, thereby enabling the researchers to crosscheck the information in a pragmatic way.

From the reader's point of view it is important that I set out my role as a Technical Officer – Monitoring for the RMP and how my role conditioned the kind of information that I received. In addition, the following paragraphs supplement the description of RMP given in chapter five.

The RMP had two different wings to manage their programme: Operations and Research Evaluation and Development (RED). The main objective of the Operations wing was to implement the programme through the field offices and the RED wing was responsible for monitoring programme implementation and to do research to assure better services and to identify problem areas and a future focus for the beneficiaries. The objectives of

[1] The RMP is implemented around 4200 UPs out of a total of approximately 4500 UPs in Bangladesh, covering 93 percentage of the area of rural Bangladesh.

RED led them to qualitative research. The RED wing had two sub–wings, namely the Monitoring and the R&P (Research and Partnering). The R&P team concentrated on fulfilling the future agendas of the programme according to the PRSP and they were based in the headquarters. The Monitoring sub-wing employed a Technical Officer (TO) in each field office to monitor programme outputs and outcomes of their respective field offices without being influenced by the field office management. It is important to mention that earlier the TO-Monitoring was supervised by the Project Manager (PM), who is the head of operation in the field office. The PM used to exercise power over programme monitoring, especially if there were any negative findings about programme implementation by the field office. In the new system, the TO-Monitoring had substantial freedom to work and used to operate as a 'third eye' of the headquarters at field office level. However, there is no chance of misinterpreting this role as policing the field office. Rather, it was to crosscheck the art of implementation of designed activities at the field office level and to provide feedback to headquarters if there were any concerns. This will be clearer if I describe my own key responsibilities.

As a TO-Monitoring, my key responsibilities were as follows:

1. Planning and implementation of monitoring activities in the field office operational area.
2. Ensuring quality monitoring and data processing, analysis and reporting.
3. Participating in different studies and evaluation and contributing in monitoring strategy and the development of tools.
4. Management and staff development.
5. Participation in other CARE Bangladesh mission and RMP initiatives.

I performed my monitoring activities on a sample basis, including the roadwork, IGA, Bank and so on. The roadwork monitoring included examining the performance of RMA women, PMC and the UP successively in road maintenance, RMA supervision and PMC management. In addition, I conducted livelihood security surveys of former beneficiaries of the RMP in order to know whether they are leading a better life after being phased out from the RMP. To have an understanding about their livelihood, TO-Monitors judged the human capital (education and skills), social capital, access to resources, crisis coping capacity, savings, fixed capital and so on.

The RMP was restructured to provide the RMA women with a sustainable and secure livelihood. Besides, it strived to strengthen capacity at local level so that they could take over the programme after the withdrawal of CARE. Therefore, they trained the UP and the PMC for a long time. Once the UP and the PMC had received training, it was still essential to assess their capacity for taking over the RMP. Accordingly, the Monitoring sub-wing designed the *LGIs Capacity Assessment Study* where the TO-Monitoring were leading the study on their respective field offices.

The insights I gained during my time with CARE were an inspiration for further research and I believe that my experience has added a dimension to the analysis that would otherwise have been absent. As Bangla-speaker, I also had advantages in communication and understanding, although I was not undertaking academic work and therefore the data generated was not of the type one would plan for in, say, intensive ethnographic fieldwork.

Because CARE has its own policy about the ethics of monitoring research, all of the respondents of this study were informed about the purpose of the study before it began. Nothing is quoted in this thesis without the appropriate consent. I have been very careful in using the names of respondents to avoid any potential harm to them. I also asked permission from the RMP Coordinator before using their information in my thesis.

The methodology of the study is described below:

Study Design

It has already been mentioned that the RMP was working with both the destitute women and the local government institutes of rural Bangladesh. According to the programme design, the effort of capacity strengthening (CS) of the local government institutions was with the objective of handing over the programme to them. Thus it was very important to assess the capacity of local government to take over the programme. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to assess:

- The role of CS training in implementation, management and supervision of RMP by LGIs (Local Government Institutions).
- Management capacities of PMCs in the implementation of RMC.

- Participation of women representatives in project management.
- Unintended benefits.
- Recommendation for better CS functioning by local government institutions in future.

Sample Design

The research design was split into two broad segments, namely quantitative and qualitative study designs, and these are sequenced below.

Sample Design for Quantitative Survey

A statistically valid sampling approach was adopted by CARE in selecting a nationally representative sample of respondents for the study.

A **two-stage** random sampling strategy was adopted. At the first stage UPs were chosen, from which respondents were selected at the second stage. A representative sample size of UPs was determined to be n = 45 with 25 per cent design effect. See table 1.1 for further details.

Table 1.1 Sample population of Union Parishads, sample size, and related issues

Description of population	Population size	Sample size	Anticipated standard error	Co-efficient of variation	Assumed design effect
Union	4,200	45	2%	6%	25%

Source: RMP/CARE 2005.

Respondents from **the selected Union Parishads** were chosen purposively using a simple random sampling technique. For such purpose necessary sampling frames were collected from the RMP headquarters.

Sample Design for Qualitative Study

Besides the quantitative survey, Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Large Group Discussions with important local level stakeholders were conducted for the collection of qualitative information.

A short questionnaire was developed for the KII, focusing on key issues, and this was administered as a means of collecting information from knowledgeable persons. In addition, Large Group and Focus Group Discussions were conducted using checklists and guidelines which were developed with the participation of Technical Officers of different wings of the RMP.

Table 1.2 Sample sizes

Respondent categories	**Sample size**	**Data collection method administered**
PMC members (Chairperson, one male member, one female member and one UP Secretary).	4 x 45= 180	Interview schedule
Knowledgeable person; (UNO and UP Chairman)	15+45= 60	Key informant interview
Members of UP	13 x 7 x 2=182	Large group discussion (2 in each zone)
Community People	7 x 7 x 1=49	Focus group discussion (1 in each zone)
RMP women	7 x 7 x 1 = 49	Focus group discussion (1 in each zone)
APO-CS	1	Discussion meeting

Source: RMP/CARE 2005.

Data Collection Instruments

Several types of data collection instruments were employed for collecting (a) necessary data from the quantitative survey, and (b) required information from qualitative investigations. The following tools were used for this data collection:

Tool-1: Interview Schedule for PMC (assessment of knowledge about the content of the modules and practice level; status of management skills of PMC members).

Tool-2 KII guide for the UNO

Tool-3 KII guide for the UP Chairperson

Tool-4 Large Group Discussion with UP Members

Tool-5 FGD with participant RMP Women

Tool-6 FGD with local leaders/opinion leaders/community leaders

Tool-7 FGD guide for trainers and training managers

Tool-8 Discussion Meeting with RMP Cell: DG-LGD-MIE & other Members

Tool-9 Checklist for Union Parishads

Field Implementation for Quantitative and Qualitative Survey

The RMP was operated by seven field offices. Therefore, seven teams were stationed in the field for fieldwork. Each team consisted of four members to conduct interviews with 26 PMC members (PMC Chairperson, female member, male member and UP Secretary). In a zone, 13 KII were conducted on an average with the UNOs and the UP Chairmen. Two Large Group Discussions were arranged in each zone. In the same way, FGDs were conducted with RMP women, community leaders and trainers.

Quality Control

As production of high quality output in the study was contingent upon the quality assurance system, a system of TQM (Total Quality Management) was instituted, which took care of all systematic arrangements and activities directed towards safeguarding, maintenance and promotion of quality throughout the study period. The TQM framework deployed involved, among others, the following:

- Ensuring full and effective coordination among the key personnel.
- Instituting a division of labour by assigning specific and time-bound job responsibilities to each member of the key personnel.
- Recruitment of support staff having appropriate qualifications, skills and motivation.

- Working out well-defined job responsibilities for each member of the support team and implementing them.
- Imparting adequate and appropriate training to the support staff.
- Instituting timely reporting and efficient communication mechanisms.
- Adopting mechanisms for the appropriate selection of study areas.
- Field checking to monitor survey data collection.
- Quality control checks of data management.
- Developing necessary field management arrangements for timely coping with unforeseen situations.
- Instituting time and cost optimization mechanisms in the study.

One trained and skilled staff member was stationed in each field office. Thus, seven skilled staff members performed the whole task of supervising the fieldwork and ensuring the collection of high quality data.

Measures Taken to Collect Quality Data

In any large scale data collection involving different categories of observation measurement units, various types of data collection instruments and a huge number of data collection staff, it is usual that in spite of excellent pre-field preparation and design, problems do still occur. In order to minimize the possibilities of problems or to minimize the extent of such problems in data collection, the following measures were taken before and during field data collection:

- Appropriate design of the data collection instruments (including pre-tests before finalising the same).
- Appropriate selection of field data collection staff with special emphasis on commitment and competence of the staff.
- Instituting total quality management approach in data collection.
- Deployment of knowledgeable persons as quality control officers by quality clusters.
- Designing all possible guidelines to ensure homogeneity in understanding among the field staff.
- Appropriate mix of members - field data collection team considering the workload, task diversions and accessibility status.

- Development of expertise among the field data collection staff to conduct interviews on specific observation measurement units.
- In-depth training to the field staff on data collection instruments (including field testing, and post-field experience sharing).
- Regular contacts (day-to-day) with the field.

Additional Information

In addition, there were 12 regional workshops with aforesaid counterparts, two 'lessons learnt' workshops with RMP employees, and one national workshop with the senior officials of the LGD of Bangladesh. I participated in all of these workshops and was a key member of the documentation team of the study. Moreover, my relevant observations, on different practices of Upazila and UP, while working in the RMP will also be used as supporting detail in different areas of arguments. Due to time and budget constraints I have not visited Bangladesh during my period of Masters Research to collect more data; rather, I have spent a little longer than average on the literature review and theoretical background of my work.

Recent publications on LG issues in the global South, and especially Bangladesh, were reviewed in order to understand the general issues in this regard. Literature on different theoretical understandings and concepts, especially local government and Decentralisation, was also an integral part in this research.

ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

This chapter has outlined the background, rationale, objectives and methodology of the thesis. The next chapter provides a detailed historical political background of local government in rural Bangladesh and explains the centralisation culture of Bangladesh's national politics. The third chapter is devoted to the theoretical frameworks, where the arguments of neoliberalism, global context of power structure and patterns of decentralisation are discussed. The fourth chapter covers the structures and functions of rural local governance of Bangladesh. The fifth chapter elucidates the field experiences and analyses the collected qualitative and quantitative data. Finally, the sixth chapter concludes with potential recommendations for a fruitful rural local governance system in Bangladesh.

CONCLUSION

The conceptual frameworks that I have outlined in this chapter will suffice as a background to my research. Their disadvantages are twofold. First, much of the work is pitched at a fairly general, and sometimes abstract, level. Second, there is relatively little high quality work on my topic for Bangladesh. On both grounds I have needed to develop my own conceptual base for my work. The thesis makes an important contribution in filling the gaps in the literature on the political geography of local governance in Bangladesh.

Chapter Two

Historical Political Context of Local Government in Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Authoritarianism is the most common political culture of Bangladesh and at different times has been labelled as Mughal Imperialism, British colonialism, Pakistani fascism, Mijubism, and military dictatorship. Even the recent experience of electoral democracy has had some elements of authoritarianism about it. If we review the political history of the last 500 years, we can categorise Bangladesh into three major eras: i) the Mughal Imperialism – when local bureaucracy assumed the power to collect taxes for the sovereign; ii) The British and Pakistani era – a power structure was established to drain away resources, and iii) Independent Bangladesh – a power struggle among the 'praetorian' intermediate class.[2] The pattern of extortion and exploitation of the common peasants has, of course, changed in these three eras. In the pre-liberation period of Bangladesh, undoubtedly, no efforts were made to decentralise power to the local level. There were some decentralised power structures in the different hierarchies at local level during the Mughals, the British and the Pakistani periods, which were directly nominated from the central government. Immediately after the independence of Bangladesh, the local government structure was similar to that of the Pakistani period. Afterwards, different regimes sought to exploit the political potential at different levels of local government by using local politics in the struggle against their political rivals.

This chapter comprises three major sections, with several subsections in each. The first two sections go hand in hand and describe the historical background and political facts of the local government of Bangladesh. To keep the flow of the literature review, there are some common arenas discussed in both sections, but the first section concentrates more on the pre-independence facts and the latter on the post-independence facts. The second section illustrates the facts of central politics and strives to link them with the politics of local government in successive regimes. Finally, the third section seeks to narrow down the former sections and distinguish the key facts of the chapter.

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[2] Peter J Bertocci (1982) uses the term 'praetorian' to refer the then political system "with low level of institutionalisation and high level of participation". By intermediate class he meant the 'middle class' and educated groups associated with the professions and the small-scale entrepreneurs that, in classical Marxist view, stands between the capital and the labour in a advanced capitalist society. He identifies i) the civil bureaucracy, ii) the military and iii) the civilian politicians and their parties as three major institutional groupings of the middle class.

THE HISTORICAL POLITICAL CONTEXT

Bangladesh has been conquered and ruled by many outsiders[3] since the emergence of the concept of local administration in the mid eleventh century until finally, it earned its freedom in the liberation war of 1971. Though, from 1050 to 1250, there had been demands for "liberties" among the inhabitants of certain parts of Western Christendom in the hope of greater privileges from the feudal lords (Wickwar, 1970), in South Asia it was not until the Mughal Empire of Akbar (1542-1605) that for the first time there developed a highly organised and effective system of administration and bureaucracy (Abedin, 1973). This system continued for a considerable time but after the death of Aurangzeb (1707) it stagnated. The administrative system had almost completely broken down by the time the British assumed the administration of India. The experiment of local government began in the mid-1760s and worked out some definite principles of the pattern of district administration in British India by the end of the 18th century.[4] It identified a more accurate way to maximise the tax take (Abedin, 1973).[5]

The British Period (1757-1947)

If we start from the beginning, boroughs and communes in Europe arose spontaneously from the very outset of the emergence of the concept of local government without anyone giving much thought to theory. But the theory became important with the arrival of Roman law from about 1250 and, thereby, the question was raised whether a borough or commune was an aggregate of individuals or a corporate body (Wickwar, 1970). The

[3] The Muslim rulers from Persia, the Mughals, the British and finally by the Pakistanis.

[4] A sound administrative system did not mean a good law and order situation for the well-being of the local inhabitants; rather the emphasis was on a more accurate way to collect maximum taxes from them. The colonial powers thrived by establishing a restricted and rigid system of government. Participation was extremely limited and only those who were proven to be loyal to the colonial rulers and trusted by them had access to the influential institutions. Leadership was concentrated in the governors and administrators from the parent country. Although a small group of indigenous leaders were trusted, their influence was limited and there was no scope for them to initiate radical changes without the approval of the colonial leaders.

[5] During the Pakistani period of 1947-71, the most dominant change in local government was the *Basic Democracy Rule*, which was introduced by the then President Ayub Khan. The Basic Democracy was a means of centralizing power which helped the then government to infiltrate at the local level.

theory of incorporation, moreover, was deeply influenced by the concept of the foundation, that is to say, an undying body of patrons incorporated in order that they might manage a perpetual endowment in the interests of a specified clientele. However, the philosophical differences that emerged between the rationalists and the Utilitarians were disruptive in regards to local bodies. Thus, the process of evolution became further complicated during the first half of 19th century by the doctrinal conflict between two schools of thought – the Cornwallis and the Munro schools (Abedin, 1973) and, eventually, district administration in the subcontinent took its final shape. In fact, Cornwallis tried to execute the same local government system to the entirety of British India, driven by ideas from British political philosophy, especially Utilitarianism (Wickwar, 1970). In contrast, the Munro school believed that these systems were completely unsuitable for South Asian society and would not have the same beneficial effects in British India as in Great Britain (Abedin, 1973). The Munro school criticised Cornwallis for not taking the social and political condition of South Asia at that time into account while introducing administrative reforms. In brief, the *Chawkidari Panchayet Act* of 1870 was the first step intended to maintain village peace and order by local initiative. Subsequently, the Local Self-Government Act 1885 and the Village Self-Government Act 1919 extended some of their law and order, public service and regulatory functions, and gave some new judicial responsibilities.[6]

The Pakistan Era (1947-1971)

After the controversial division of British India in 1947 into India and Pakistan, theoretically, the previous local government system was sustained for next 12 years, though from time to time these Acts underwent repeated amendments. General Ayub Khan, who seized power in 1958, introduced a system of local government known as the Basic Democracy (Abedin, 1973; Bode, 2002; Siddiqui, 1992; Mallik, 2004; Panday,

[6] These acts, among other things, introduced election as a mode of choosing one's representative and subsequently extended its coverage. But Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of the Municipalities continued to be elected indirectly by the popularly elected commissioners. One of the acts, the Bengal Municipal Act of 1932, strengthened the powers of Municipalities in levying rates and taxes and in the utilisation of funds (Siddiqui 1994:47). But the same act provided considerable powers, to the government and local officials to inspect, supervise and control Municipalities and negated the powers of taxation of local level bodies to a large degree.

2005; Hossain, 2005). The concept of Basic Democracy, a four-tier system, lacked novelty and innovation in terms of democratic participation of the community in electing their leaders. According to this act, a rural area of around of 10,000 people was considered as a Union, where a Union Council of 10-15 members was formed; two-thirds of the members were directly elected by the community and rest were nominated by the central government (GoB, 1997). This modified the colonial system by creating directly elected union councils (who then appointed their own chairman); the Thana councils comprising union chairs and appointed officials; district councils with representatives elected by the chairman and appointed officials; and divisional councils with appointed officials and representatives elected by the district bodies (Abedin, 1973; Siddiqui, 1992; Mallik, 2004; Panday, 2005). The District and the Union were granted limited revenue-raising powers and had executive powers, whilst the Thana and divisional councils had only co-ordination and consultative functions. Some additional functions were added to those already performed at the Union level. The overall effect of the legislation was, however, to increase central government control. In the years that followed, the system was under-resourced, with no regular provision of central government grants.

Independent Bangladesh (Since 1971)

Political Parties and Local Government: Decentralisation or Counter Decentralisation?

Bangladesh, with the great promise of an independent People's Republic, started its journey after a nine-month bloody liberation war in 1971. Since then, there have been a number of amendments in the Local Government Act which were guided by the various ruling political parties (CPD 2002). In the last 24 years, Bangladesh has been governed by three major political parties, including two which were initiated through military regimes, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Jatiya Party (JP). The Awami League (AL) and the BNP introduced and amended local government policy in the first decade of liberation to strengthen their own power at the grassroots. It is well known that the major distinction between the AL and the BNP on the local government issue is the concept of BKSAL (Bangladesh Krishok Sromik Awami League), introduced in 1975 by the then President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and Gram Sarkar (formerly Swnirvar Gram Sarkar) introduced by former President Ziaur Rahman in 1976. The JP President Lieutenant

General (Retired) Hossain Muhammad Ershad came in power in 1982 in a bloodless coup. Ershad, one of the most corrupt dictators any third world country has ever produced in modern history (Hussain, 2004), tried to grasp power at the Upazila level. He was overthrown in a mass uprising on December 6th, 1990. The JP is now (2007) divided into three parts and the chairman of the mainstream, Mr Ershad, is very busy saving himself from the consequences of his previous deeds. Since 1990, local government structures have changed with the election of each new government.[7]

The present structures and procedures also reflect the former legacies introduced by the British and Pakistanis, and are also a function of the more recent history of a succession of civilian and military regimes, followed by an extended period of parliamentary rule. The country now has a unitary system of government, which in principle embodies a clear separation of powers between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, and a constitution that promises to ensure a wide range of fundamental and democratic rights.[8] However, the changes tailored to decentralise the LG by both military and civilian governments in different times were criticised because of their controversial objectives and practices. The reality of these changes matches the observation of Mawhood (1983) that they have been "*experiments with local government that end in chaos and bankruptcy; 'decentralised' structures of administration that only act as a more effective tool for centralising the power*" (p. 1).

Key Developments of Local Government:

After a long military regime, Bangladesh has, at last, now experienced electoral democracy for the last one and a half decades. Yet the elected government is as alienated

[7] Since the emergence of an independent country there have been frequent policy changes and rearrangements of the tiers of local government. At the same time, these bodies are alleged to have been exploited by both democratic and military national governments as means for political mobilisation and consolidation of power, and not allowed to operate as autonomous, decentralised local government institutions. The above has also been reflected in one of the important observations of the Honourable Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh (CPD, 2002).

[8] Constitution of Bangladesh: Article 9. Promotion of local government institutions: The State shall encourage local Government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation shall be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers and women.

from the common people as during military rule. Some very important developments in local government are worth recording here: *first*, the emergence of a powerful class of politically-oriented local leaders who are very eager to increase their influence on the members of local bureaucracy, and who are officially and hierarchically responsible to the central government (Blair, 2005; Abedin, 1973). *Second*, local officials and the members of the local bodies have been required to undertake responsibility for planning and implementing the first expanding community development programmes. *Third*, social transformation has resulted in social tensions, which have had a considerable impact on the behavioural aspect of local administration and politics (Blair, 2005; Barenstein, 2000). *Fourth*, most of the developmental functions for which local government units are made responsible under the legal framework, such as family welfare, education, public health, social welfare, and so forth, are administered by different agencies of the national government. *Fifth*, the central or national government primarily exercises its control over the LG bodies through its field-level government functionaries such as the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and the UNO, the heads of the district and *Upazila* administrations respectively (CPD, 2002). This provision allows the district administration to axe an LG unit such as the UP (lowest tier of local government) at any time and consequently, makes them extremely vulnerable to the political and administrative whims of the government. *Sixth*, local government bodies have been chronically resource-poor in Bangladesh. The local government regulations empowered them to mobilise resources from local sources through assessment and levy of taxes, leasing of local *Hats*[9] and Bazaars, water bodies, and so on, but they do not receive the total resources generated from their entitled sources (The Local Government (Union Parishads) Ordinance, 1983). *Seventh*, institutional capacity includes both human competence and logistics. Relevant studies reveal that the overwhelming majority of the chairmen and members of local government units lack knowledge and understanding of the operational procedures and functions of these bodies. Again, the UP is very dependent on its Secretary for all official correspondence. *Eighth*, accountability and transparency of operations and functions of the Local Government units are essential for ensuring their credibility to the electorate. This can only be achieved through adequate supervision and monitoring. Legally, the Monitoring & Evaluation Wing of the Local Government Department of the Ministry of Local Government Rural Development and Cooperatives (MLGRD&C) is responsible for

[9] Local periodic market which is considered as a common property like large water bodies.

monitoring the functions of local bodies. But it has been observed that the monitoring mechanism of the said wing is weak, inadequate and ineffective (CPD, 2002). Therefore, this research will strive to identify and theorise the present situation of local government of Bangladesh.

THE AMBIGUOUS CENTRAL POLITICS AND THE FATE OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN BANGLADESH

Though the essence of self local government arose around the middle of the tenth century, the abstract term "local government" was first used by Lord John Russell in the House of Commons on 5th June 1835, in introducing the Municipal Reform Bill (Wickwar, 1970). After that, Local Government experienced many successive reforms, which had some consequences for the Global UK.[10] India, for instance, had connections with British theory and practice until 1947.[11] However, there has been another massive global flow of decentralisation in the third world since the early 1980s, as a consequence of globalisation and the neo-liberalism described above.

The Pre-Independence Situation

As we have seen, local government in Bangladesh has a history and tradition going back to medieval times. The four-tier local government system during the Mughal era in the undivided India had little interaction with rural communities other than to extract [forced] tax contributions (Abedin, 1973; Siddiqui, 1992). The British introduced a modern local government system in the late nineteenth century and this was later modified, again according to the needs of maximising tax collection (Abedin, 1973; Siddiqui, 1992; Hossain, 2005). The Basic Democracy Act of 1958, which was later amended in 1962 to be more democratic at the Union level (GoB, 1997; Siddiqui, 1992; Toufique and Turton, 2005), had no fundamental difference from the former British system.

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[10] As the UK was ruling over many parts of the globe like India, Australia, North America and so on, the entire empire is termed the Global UK in this thesis.

[11] The British regime of 190 years until 1947 is termed British India throughout this paper. Bangladesh is representative of processes and structures of local governance throughout that realm.

Post Independence

It was expected that decentralisation would precipitate more democratic flows of participation by the people after the liberation of Bangladesh. Since independence, different forms of local government were shaped in various levels, i.e. the UP, Thana (Upazila) and District (Zila). In reality, effective power was always vested in the centre and, therefore, the objectives of the local government were never achieved (Siddiqui, 1992; Alam, Haque and Westergaard, 1994; Siddiqui, 1996; CPD, 2000; Toufique and Turton, 2005; Hossain, 2005). Central government under all regimes has attempted manipulation to retain power and exercise its control over local government (CPD, 2000). The different political activities of the successive political regimes explain their hidden political objectives. The politics of decentralisation of local government is not alienated from central or national politics; rather it is an integral part of it. If we study the emergence of this concept, we will find that the sovereign power pursued the decentralisation policy to consolidate their power-base at the local level (Wickwar, 1970). Therefore, it is very important to study the successive political situations of Bangladesh to know whether the local government decentralisation efforts were for the sake of decentralisation or counter-decentralisation/centralisation. The next paragraphs explore the political situations of the successive regimes of independent Bangladesh, which helps to examine their motives on devolution of power to the local level.

The Era of Seikh Mujibur Rahman (1971-1975)

Peiris (1998) strives to place the different conflict situations in proper perspective, and examines their highly ramified causal connections, which include destabilising external influences, inter-group divergences of interests and aspirations within the country, economic stagnation, and the persistence of poverty. He concentrates on the political facts and gives a comprehensive idea since the Hindu-Muslim rivalry in pre-partition Bengal and includes the disputes in the pre and post liberation periods. Peiris says that the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) became the major opposition to the AL after liberation. He claims that by August 1974, 62,000 JSD activists had been imprisoned by the then government for political reasons. The general election of 1973 was apparently more or less fair (Peiris, 1998; Ahmed, 2004); but by putting probable political rivals in prison or under threat, the AL won the public mandate. Peiris (1998) adds that the constitution of 1972 extended the

direct authority of the central government to the hilly area of the south-east which, since 1900, had been governed under a special administration and legal arrangement known as the Hill Tract Regulations (Abedin, 1973, Siddiqui, 1992). This often conflicts with 'secularism', which is one of the four principles of the constitution that was promulgated in 1972.[12] If we just retrieve the argument of the Cornwallis and the Munro schools, which was described earlier, we find that, in the same vein of the Cornwallis thoughts, the then government has pursued the policy for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which was criticised for its lack of novelty and innovation.

Key Political Features during the Mujib Regime

Before going on to a discussion of the BKSAL, it is important to describe the political scenario of that time, which ultimately drove the ruling party to introduce the BKSAL. The political and economic situation immediately after liberation was chaotic because of the losses and disruption suffered during war; the diverse goals of different groups (including the regular army and civil servants) developed under a diverse philosophy, which was sponsored by the global political elites; global inflation in 1972; natural disasters; and, moreover, the enormous corruption of the political elites.

Fragmented National Consensus: The AL had demonstrated their failure of leadership during the formative stages of Bangladesh (Peiris, 1998) especially after performing fairly well in their first two years (Ahmed, 2004). The national liberation struggle was itself contested and sections of fellow Bengalis fought against the Pakistani soldiers. But, the Awami leadership failed to build up a national consensus even among those who had constituted the vanguard of the liberation struggle (Peiris, 1998; Ahmed, 2004). Therefore, radical young men, who effectively participated in the liberation war but did not belong to the Awami League, felt cheated when they were excluded from political power after independence.

[12] The constitution promulgated in 1972 was based on a political doctrine that had come to be known as 'Mujibism,' comprising the principles of nationalism, democracy, socialism and secularism. It provided for a unitary system of government headed by a prime minister, a multi-party polity, and a legislature elected on the basis of a universal adult franchise (Peiris, 1998).

Corruption and Economic Collapse: Ahmed (2004) argues that though 86 percent of the industries and 87 percent of the foreign trade was nationalised, distribution was conducted by the private traders who were issued permits and licenses, among which a substantial number were issued to AL activists. These activists, in turn, sold them to traders and, as a result, they became owners of a large amount of 'unearned money'. Again, the administrators of the nationalised industries were also recruited from the AL leaders, without giving much thought to their capacity to hold such positions which, eventually, resulted in a declining trend in production (Karim, 2005). The extreme floods of 1974 also contributed to this economic collapse. Thus, on the one hand, the national economy was stagnating and, on the other hand, under the patronage of Awami rule, a new class of 'nouveau riche' mushroomed. Was this due to Mijib's ignorance? Was it appropriate that he should place his party's interest over the national interest? What did the nation expect of him? It was his party people who got involved in rampant corruption. Karim (2005) mentioned, regarding the state of corruption during Mujib's regime, that the reputed journalist Lawrence Lifschultz wrote in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* on 30th Aug 1974 that: "Corruption and malpractices are nothing new. But Dhaka people think the way the corruption and malpractices and plunder of national wealth that had taken place during Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's regime is unprecedented".

Growing Dissatisfaction in the Armed Services: Mujib's pro-Indian attitude and socialist principles led to dissatisfaction among those whose property was nationalised, and among businessman and military officers. Most of the defence services, and especially the freedom fighters, held anti-Indian views and were not happy with the Mujib government for the following reasons:

- Most of the freedom fighters believed that the Indian army only walked in when the war was nearly finished, thereby robbing the Bangladesh military forces of their glory. The Indian army also took the arms captured from the Pakistani army and Bangladesh military officers were not happy with this.
- Many senior officers believed that the interim government of Mujibnagar signed a secret treaty with the Indian government which would eventually be a threat to the sovereignty of Bangladesh (Ahmed, 2004). As the then government failed to gain any significant concessions from India in disputed issues like enclaves and river water, the suspicions deepened.

- From the beginning, the regular army did not like the government's concentration on the *Rakkhi Bahini*[13] instead of them, which was evident by successive decreases in the defence budget and increases in the number of Rakkhi Bahini.

In much scholarly writing another group of army officers are identified who were all repatriated from Pakistan in 1973. This group also had an anti-Indian stand and were more influenced by the Pakistan-US policy.

Political Rivalry and Violence: A class conflict, which was earlier subjugated by the demand of regional autonomy, emerged as a crucial problem. The threat came from the radical forces that had been working as an underground army before independence and surfaced afterwards (Peiris, 1998; Ahmed, 2004). One of these radical groups, named the JSD (Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal), was supported by a group of military officers, mainly advocated by Colonel Abu Taher and Colonel Ziauddin, who played significant role in the war and were followers of the Chinese Model of a productive army. They started killing AL workers and other enemies of their revolution. Lifschultz (1979) gives a detailed discussion of the radical movement of the day. The revolutionary forces could have been confronted by ideological clarity at political level and by governmental performance at societal level. But the government declared a state of emergency on 28 December 1974, which provided them with special powers of arrest, curtailed the power of the judiciary, and muzzled the press.

Thus, a number of matters made the political situation worse: Mujib's stand with the Indo-Russian block, radical movements against Mujib, growing dissatisfaction among the military and other pressure groups, enormous corruption in the Awami regime, global economic recession, and natural disasters, together with a crippled economy. In response, the government tried to grasp power centrally by the virtue of the BKSAL, which could never promise an ideal decentralised local government in the interests of the nation.

The Local Government under the One Party Rule – The BKSAL Concept

After independence, the new Mujib Government immediately renamed the local bodies. The Union Council became Union Panchayet. Accordingly, the Thana and District

[13] A special paramilitary security force responsible directly to the Prime Minister.

Council appeared as Thana Development Council and Zila Board. Public administrators were appointed in each of them. Union Councils were headed by the Circle officer, while the Thana and Zila boards were controlled by the sub-divisional officer and the deputy commissioner respectively (Siddiqui 1992, Mallick 2004, Hossain 2004). According to the recommendations of the then Administrative Reform Committee, a complete restructuring of bureaucracy was attempted, which organised all civil servants into a single class. However, Siddiqui (1992) has argued that the President's Order No 22 of

Box 2.1: Presidential Order of January 25, 1975 (Karim M A, 2005)

4th amendment sated:

"Before this law had been promulgated, the person who was the President will not remain as President and the post of the presidency will fall vacant. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will be the President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and shall take over the powers as the Executive President, and will continue as the President made by law under this constitutional amendment. According to the constitution the republic will have one President and one vice-President. The people will directly elect the President. The President will nominate the Vice President. Tenure of the President and Vice President will be for five years. President will have all executive powers to administer the Republic. He either directly or through his nominee will execute those powers. The Vice President will have powers to act as decided by the Presidential orders. A cabinet will be formed to assist and advise the President.

The President will have the power to nominate a Prime Minister, Ministers, deputy Ministers, state Ministers from among the Parliament members or anyone from outside who is considered fit to be a Parliamentarian. Every Minister can speak and take part in other activities in the Parliament. But if he is not an elected member then he cannot take part in voting. The President will chair the cabinet meetings. On his order the Vice President or the Prime Minister can chair such meetings. The Ministers will remain at their posts as long as the President desires.

Under the amended bill the President has been authorised to form one political party in the country. This party will be the national party. According to the amendment no legal action can be constituted in any court of law against the President. And no court can issue any warrant of arrest or detention order against the President. No citizen is allowed to form any political party or join in any political activities other than the national party. The President will also be the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces."

1973 promised no major change in any sphere of local government beyond the Basic Democracy Order of 1959, other than some marginal compositional changes at Union level. By that Order, the Union Panchayet was again renamed the Union Parishad.

However, the effort was seen in a soft light of decentralisation by the change that the UP Chairman was to be no longer elected by the members of the Parishad, but rather directly elected by the entire voters of the UP (Mallik 2004, Siddiqui 1992, Hossain 2004). A position of Vice-Chairman was created along with the Chairman in each UP, who was also to be elected by direct mandate of that community.

The above discussion suggests that the government did nothing to provide an elected local government at every tier other than the UP. Furthermore, the local government felt under tremendous threat by a Presidential Order of January 25, 1975 and article 117A (Box 1), which would assure the AL supreme power and would make the country a one party state under one leader. In accordance, on June 16, 1975, a Newspaper Cancellation Act was promulgated, which permitted only four national dailies to be published along with a few weeklies (Karim, 2005; Ahmed, 2004). This was simply an irony for a supposedly democratic local government system, which was guaranteed by article 59 of the constitution. However, according to the order, all sub-divisions were upgraded to districts and districts were to be governed by the District Governors who were to be appointed by the government (Banglapedia, Mallik 2004, Siddiqui 1992). But a bloody military coup on August 15, 1975 prevented the implementation of this system and Mujib was killed along with other family members at his residence.

The Evolution of the Military Regime by Ziaur Rahman (1976-1981)

As mentioned previously, at the end stage of the Mujib era, and especially from 15th August to 7th November 1975, the country was in a disorganised state. Ordinary Bangladeshis were extremely confused with the whole situation as there was no political leadership to direct the nation along the right path; to make matters worse, Mujib was brutally killed by a group of junior military officers in association with Mujib's close fellows. Zia was appointed as the Chief of Army Staff on 15 August 1975[14] but he was also arrested by Khaled Mosharof in another coup on 3rd November 1975. The next four days were crucial to the people of Bangladesh and there was great uncertainty while the four national leaders of the Mujibnagar Government were brutally murdered in the

[14] Khondakar Moshtaq Ahmed, one of the closest associate of Seikh Mujibur Rahman, assumed the chair of presidency after the assassination on the 15 August and appointed Major General Zia as the Chief of Army Staff (http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/R_0028.HTM; accessed on 16.04.2006).

Central Jail in Dhaka (Ekushey TV, 2001). The 3rd November coup was a counter attack to re-establish the former government, which was functionally handicapped after the 15th August. However, a third uprising came from the revolutionary army group in association with ordinary people, led by Colonel Taher on 7th November 1975, bringing Zia to power by the killing of Khaled Mosharof. In www.col-taher.com, developed by Colonel Taher Sangshad, it is mentioned that Taher helped Zia to assume power with an objective and/or unwritten treaty to free the JSD prisoners who had been sent to jail during the Mujib era. However, Zia then assumed the power as the Chief Marshal Law Administrator[15].

Zia's Successive Involvement with Power and Formation of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party:

As President, Zia announced a 19-point programme of economic reform on 30 April 1977 and began dismantling the Marshal Law Administration. A nationalist front called *Jatiyatabadi Ganatantrik Dal* (Nationalist Democratic Party) was formed in 1978 under his patronage, with Vice-President Justice Abdus Sattar as its convenor.[16] Being motivated by the nationalist activities of *Jatiyatabadi Ganatantrik Dal*, Ziaur Rahman formed the BNP on 01 September 1977, having in view the forthcoming elections for the National Parliament, which he promised to conduct by 1978 when assuming the presidency. Zia won the June 1978 elections with a 76 percent mandate and assumed the presidency for five years (Peiris 1998). Thus the military emerged as the ruling elite in Bangladesh.

Mentioning Mujib as a *charismatic leader*, Ahmed (2004) suggests that in their first two years the Awami League performed fairly well. He describes then the sordid politics of the AL in last two years of their first spell after 1971 by mentioning emerging class conflicts, autocracy, corruption, bureaucracy, nepotism and so on. However, he is influenced by Mujib's successor, General Zia, when he mentions that:

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[15] Though the Chief Justice Sayem was the Chief Marshal Law Administrator and Zia was his chief deputy, but power was in the grip of Zia and he became the Chief Martial Law Administrator on 19 November 1976, when Justice Sayem relinquished his position and ultimately, the Presidency of Bangladesh on 21 April 1977 (http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/R_0028.HTM; accessed on 16.04.2006).

[16] http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/B_0226.htm; accessed on 16.04.2006

> "...Zia assumed power by default rather than by design...Zia's loyalty to and reliance on the military was deep...initiated a number of participatory programmes...One of the reasons why Zia was killed in the abortive coup of 30 May 1981, some scholars have argued, was his 'over-democratising' of the political system...The senseless and dastardly assassination of Zia by a section of the armed forces not only endeared Zia to the nation but also created a kind of abhorrence towards men-in-uniform..." (Ahmed, 2004. pp. 109-110)

However, Zia was confronted by different interest groups and tried to make checks and balances, either by offering lucrative amenities or by dint of his power, to defuse his rivals and strengthen his powerbase.

Zia's Political Rivals:

After assuming power, Zia continued to face opposition from both civilian organisations and sections of the armed forces. Peiris (1998) explains the political rivals of Zia in his initial days. According to him, civilian opposition came from several sections such as the leaders of BAKSAL and other pro-Awami groups, the radical JSD (which had considerable support among urban youth and rank and file of the army) and other numerically small but militant Marxist groups. He continues that, on the military side, apart from remnants of the *Jatiya Rakshi Bahini*, there were the regulars who were loyal to the radicals among the military elite.

Strategy Taken to Counter the Opposition:

Now, if we look back to 7 November and its aftermath, we will find that, though the JSD people were freed immediately after Zia took power, they were again pushed back into prison at the end of 1975 and Colonel Taher was accused of revolutionary activity and sentenced to death in July 1976. In the latter half of 1976, Zia subdued several minor revolts in the army in the course of which some of his military rivals were killed or sacked. According to Peiris (1998), one of the bloodiest episodes in the military history of Bangladesh occurred in 1977, taking the form of a mutiny staged by the army radicals, evidently at the instigation of the JSD and its suppression involved a ruthless purge with

more than 1,100 executions and the disbanding of several army units. Thus, Zia encountered the radical forces.

It was mentioned earlier that the Awami League was basically an urban-based political party before independence, which extended its arena to all spheres of urban and rural areas by organizing the Awami Jubo League and the Awami Krishok-Sromik League. Zia, on the one hand, created openings for the assignment of retired military officers to lucrative jobs in other sectors (Ahmed, 2004), which helped his power base in the urban areas and, above all, in the central government. He also tried to form the Gram Sarkar at the rural level as the lowest tier of the local government, dominated by his entrusted followers (Panday, 2005; Hossain, 2005). Ahmed (2004) writes that in March 1979, 25 of the 625 people in the senior policy pool who were responsible for policy-making in the secretariat were military officers. He continues that, in June 1980, out of 101 Chairmen and Managing Directors of the public corporations, 42 were military officers and retired bureaucrats. In January 1981, 22 of the 40 District Superintendents and Additional Superintendents of Police were army officers. Moreover, 500 retired military officers were employed in industry, business, foreign trade, or supply and contracts under the patronage of the government. As all of these administrators were loyal to Zia, it was easier for him to strengthen his own power base by eliminating his rivals in urban areas. His rural rivals, mainly from the Awami League, were overpowered by his new policy of the Gram Sarkar, which is described later.

The Local Government under the first Military Regime

Just after taking power, Major General Ziaur Rahman (1976-81) disbanded District Governorship and promulgated the Local Government Ordinance 1976, which provided a three tier local government system:

1. Union Parishad for a Union;
2. Thana Parishad for a Thana; and
3. Zilla Parishad for a District.

Though the ordinance provides for elected councils at all levels except the Thana, there was no attempt to install an elected government at the district level (Hossain 2004). Following previous practice, the Sub-Divisional Officer and DCs remained the

administrators at the Thana and District levels respectively. President Zia abolished the Vice Chairman's position and introduced a provision for nominating two women members at the UP level. Moreover, he introduced the Gram Sarkar (later, the word 'Swanirvar' was added in front) as the lowest tier of local government by an amendment in the Local Government Act, 1976 and formulated rules for its organisation and administration (GoB, 1997). The Swanirvar Gram Sarkar was headed by the Gram Pradhan (Village chief) and consisted of two members from different functional/interest groups to ensure their representation. They were chosen through consensus of the villager elders present in a meeting. The Swanirvar Gram Sarkar was assigned the responsibility of increasing food production, eradicating illiteracy, reducing population growth, and maintaining law and order in the village (Siddiqui, 1992; GoB, 1997). The Swanirvar Gram Sarkar movement enjoyed enthusiastic support from the national government. But it became stagnant with the assassination of president Zia in May, 1981 and was abolished by the successor military government headed by Ershad who assumed the power in early 1982 by a bloodless coup.

***Politics of Gram Sarkar*:**

In a similar vein to Mujib, the Zia regime introduced nothing newer than the pre-BKSAL system of the Gram Sarkar. Zia abolished single party politics by allowing some extreme religious parties (especially those banned during the Awami regime) to participate (Peiris, 1998) and once again gave the bureaucracy a free hand to control local councils, which is simply contradictory to the concepts of decentralisation and democratisation. After the presidential election in June, 1978 and the formation of the BNP, efforts were made to extend its organisation to the village level to counteract its arch rival the Awami League in rural areas (Hossain 2005) and to consolidate its power there. Zia replaced Secularism from the preamble of the Constitution with "Absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah, the Beneficent and the Merciful"; Socialism was dropped, and "economic and social justice" replaced it. This cosmetic surgery was meant to woo the voters, most of whom were practising Muslims (Hussain 2004). As Peiris (1998) notes, Zia's method of building up trade union and youth support for the BNP through favouritism also resulted in the blatant exercise of violence by pro-government groups operating at the level of institutions such as universities and urban work places. Evidently, according to Peiris, the government made no attempt to curb the rising tide of corruption and lawlessness. Karim

(2005) indicates that Zia was incorruptible in terms of money and wealth; but he turned a blind eye towards the corruption of those around him. However, both the Mujib and the Zia governments were concerned about firmly cementing their powerbase and, thus, were apathetic about the effective reorganisation of local government institutions.

Ershad (1982-1990): Another Era of Military Regime

After the assassination of Zia, Justice Sattar assumed the position first of temporary political successor and then of elected President from November 1981. However, he was overthrown by Lieutenant General H M Ershad. Following his predecessors, Ershad suspended the constitution and – citing pervasive corruption, ineffectual government, and economic mismanagement – declared martial law on March 1982 (Peiris, 1998). This continued until November 1986 (Ahmed, 2004). It was the personal quest for power, and the political vacuum left within the BNP after the death of Zia, that took Ershad to the office of the presidency. Yet he had to face rivalry from both the BNP and the AL. Through Martial Law he prohibited all kinds of political activities within the country, divided the country into five administrative units to execute the judiciary activities under military tribunals, launched a campaign against the corruption of the former BNP government, and imprisoned many BNP political activists, including some ministers. Thus, he tried to work in the same vein as Zia to undermine his potential opponents. In addition, he gave greater emphasis than Zia to converting the country into an Islamic state, for instance by his attempt to introduce compulsory Arabic Studies into the school curriculum (Peiris, 1998). This was an attempt to gain mass popularity since most Bangladeshis are Muslim and apparently conservative.

Formation of the Jatiya Party: From Military to Political President

Ershad took over the country's Presidency from Justice AFM Ahsanuddin Chowdhury on 11 December 1983 (Banglapedia Online), removed the prevailing ban on the political parties, and formed an organisation named 'Janadal' to launch an Eight-point programme. He sought public approval in a so-called '*ha-na*' (yes-no) vote in March 1985 and obtained a 94 percent mandate (Peiris, 1998), although the turnout was very small (Ahmed, 2004). Ershad then converted his 'Janadal' into an electoral organisation named the Jatiya Party, designed as his political vehicle for the transition from martial law. He was then elected for a five-year term in the Presidential Election of 1986, which was

boycotted by both the AL and the BNP. Controversially, the AL participated in the 1986 general election in which the Jatiya Party managed an absolute majority in the National Parliament (Banglapedia Online; Peiris, 1998). The opposition protested against a controversial bill to include the military in local administrative councils. The government then began to arrest scores of opposition activists under the Special Powers Act of 1974 which had been introduced by the Mujib government. Accordingly, the then government declared a state of emergency, dissolved the parliament and scheduled fresh elections for March 1988. This time the main two opposition parties unanimously refused to participate on the grounds that the government was incapable of holding free and fair elections (Peiris, 1998; Banglapedia Online). Despite the opposition boycott, the government proceeded and the Jatiya Party won 251 out of the 300 seats. At this point opposition to Ershad's rule began to gain momentum, escalating by the end of 1990 in frequent general strikes, increased campus protests, public rallies, and a general disintegration of law and order, and on December 6, 1990, Ershad was compelled to offer his resignation due to massive public demonstrations and international pressure as well. He handed over the power to a nonpolitical caretaker government headed by the Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed.

Local Government Politics during the Ershad Regime

It has already been mentioned that the previous local government was dissolved by Ershad at the very outset of his regime. He then introduced the Upazila system in 1985 and held elections for these local councils in May of the same year. Siddiqui (1996) argues that the original idea of making the Thana (then renamed the upazila) the nerve centre of administration came from Aktar Hamid Khan during the Pakistan era, which Ershad took up and gave shape to under pressure from the donor community. Under the threat of Ershad's political rivals, a decentralisation measure like the upazila system opened up the way to reach out to the vast majority of people living in the rural areas. Ershad, on the one hand, reduced the power of the union councils (where he would have faced his political opponents) by shifting the responsibilities from them to the upazila level (Siddiqui, 1992; Wastergaard, 2000), which became evident in his effort made in 1987 to put the military on the local councils, and by the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act 1983, where the 28 income sources of the UP were reduced to only 5 and the rest were handed over to the Upazila (GoB, 1997). On the other hand, he ensured,

through 'vote robbery' and similar practices, that gangsters and thugs supporting his party became Upazila Parishad Chairmen (Siddiqui, 1996). Rahman and Khan (1997) criticise the politicisation of the upazila in favour of the ruling elite under the Ershad regime and compare it with its antecedents like the Basic Democracy Act in the 1960s and the Gram Sarkar Act in the late 70s. They add that being against the upazila reform of Ershad, Khaleda Zia (widow of Ziaur Rahman) attracted a large number of allies from civil bureaucrats who were unhappy with losing their substantial power to the politicians. However, in theory, it was (and still 'is') a genuine decentralisation, because:

1. The upazila chairman was elected by the entire adult population of the upazila;
2. The upazila parishad was vested with resources;
3. The upazila was given power to implement development activities; and
4. All government organisations at that level were made responsible and accountable to the upazila parishad.

Though the AL and the BNP collectively boycotted the Ershad regime from 1987, controversially, both of them participated in the Upazila election in early 1990 in which the BNP received a handful of seats (24 out of the 460). The AL also participated in another election in 1986, as mentioned earlier. This gives rise to two important questions. Did the opposition accept the then government as democratic and fair by participating in elections? If not, why did they participate? However, the above example/event will help to provide links with the activities of the political parties.

The above discussion suggests that, on a large scale, three successive governments followed almost the same strategy to counter their opposition and, often, used Local Government as a pawn in their political contests.

The Khaleda Zia Regime (1991-1996): From Autocracy to Electoral Democracy

After the 1991 general election, which is regarded as the country's first fair election, Khaleda Zia became prime minister. Under her the BNP won by 170 seats, including the indirect elections on reserved women's-seats and by-elections, while the AL, the Jatiya Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami won respectively 91, 35 and 20 seats and accordingly the BNP formed the government. The tie between the BNP and the AL was short-lived during the last days of the Ershad regime and not sustained once the BNP came into power.

Peiris (1998) pointed out that the affiliation of the Jamaat-e-Islami (who fought against the liberation along with the Pakistani Army) with the BNP as one of the reasons for the Awami League's dissatisfaction on the BNP, though, ironically, the Jamaat-e-Islami had been an ally of the Awami League in the non-cooperation movement under the caretaker government (Banglapedia Online). The situation worsened in March 1994 when the AL accused the BNP of rigging a by-election in the Magura Constituency. It is assumed that the massive losses of the BNP in the Mayoral elections of Dhaka and Chittagong city drove them to win in that election at any cost in order to regenerate the enthusiasm among their activists. However, this conspiracy gave rise to similar allegations to those which the AL and the BNP had made against the Ershad government and, thereby, boycotted the 1988 election. The opposition then continued a campaign of marches, demonstrations, and indefinite strikes in an effort to force the government to resign. The opposition including the BNP's ally, the Jamaat-e-Islami, boycotted the scheduled election on 15 February 1996 under the Khaleda Government. But, the government initially stuck to its position and enjoyed a massive victory in the absence of the major opposition but, finally, handed over power to a neutral caretaker government headed by former Chief Justice, Mohammad Habibur Rahman.

The Local Government under the Khaleda Regime

After 15 years of military regimes, it was debatable whether the democratically elected government would retain the upazila system. At the very least it was expected that the existing chairmen would be suspended and fresh election held to bring genuine representatives into power. Surprisingly, it took Khaleda a few months to abolish the Upazila system and replace it by a bureaucratic Thana system (Rahman and Khan, 1997; Siddiqui, 1996; Panday, 2005; Hossain, 2005; Mallik, 2004). Siddiqui (1996) feels that this was like throwing out the baby with the bath water but there were many reasons for dissolving the Upazila system:

1. The BNP had only a handful of Upazila chairmen, as mentioned above;
2. There was an overt and covert consensus among MPs from the main political parties for abolition because they did not want any powerful rival in their own constituency exercising substantial power over development resources. For instance, Siddiqui (1996) recalls the bitter fights between the Jatiya Party MPs and Upazila Chairmen during the Ershad regime, from which other political parties

learned a lesson. MPs in Bangladesh make political gains through the use of development funds (*The Daily Star*, August 03, 2005).

3. Bureaucratic power helps any government to extend its powerbase efficiently in a short period of time.

The government explored other opportunities to resolve the conflict of power between the MPs and the Upazila chairman; ironically, the democratically elected BNP government indulged itself in an anti-democratic practice as regards decentralisation. They did nothing to develop a decentralised local government in this spell but promulgated the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act 1993, which promised some insignificant structural change and formation of Thana Development Coordination Committee (TDCC) by another official Order.

The Sheikh Hasina Regime (1996-2001)

In the general election of 12 June 1996, the Awami League won 146 seats and was able to mobilise an absolute majority by forging an alliance with the Jatiya Party. However, the Jatiya Party and its president Ershad, withdrew his support from the government in September 1997. From the last half of the former BNP regime, the main opposition, the Awami League, stayed away from parliament, accusing the government party of not cooperating with the opposition by participating in parliamentary debate. Following the same track, the BNP walked out at the end of 1996, charging the government with harassing and jailing BNP activists and they only returned in January 1997 on the basis of a four-point agreement with the government. Again, they walked out in August 1997, asserting that the agreements were not being implemented and returned in March 1998. From early 1999 the BNP boycotted all elections, stressing the lack of transparency and fairness in elections held under the AL regime.

The Awami League failed to promise anything better in terms of democratic politics, rather following the example of their predecessors. They did make a significant effort on the Ganges Water Treaty, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, increasing food grain production, and so on. But they were pilloried in the media for massive corruption, charges of violence against the sons and relatives of a few leaders (especially against the sons of Kamal Majumdar and M. Chowdhury Maya for murder and extortion), nepotism, substantial violence by the AL student wing (Jashimuddin Manik, the *Chatra* League

president of Jahangirnagar University became legendary for his anti-social violence), a great fall in the share market and government's silence on that, and, above all, the rise of gang leaders like Jaynal Hazari under the shelter of the government. All of these events were well known and were punished by the voters in the 2001 poll when the AL was elected in only 62 seats.

The Local Government reform under Shiekh Hasina

The Awami League constituted a Local Government Commission, which came up with a report in May 1997. According to the recommendations of that commission, the Awami League tried to form a Gram Parishad (with some modification), but this was in vain after a verdict by the high court. There were no major steps taken during this regime, other than the introduction of direct elections for reserved women-seats at the Union level.

The Four Party Alliance Government (2001-2006)

There has been no major change in the political environment under the various governments since 1991. Each government has been corrupt and concerned with politicisation at the local level, and in turn the opposition has called strikes and involved themselves with different types of violence and destruction.

Reorientation of the Gram Sarkar

A second era of Gram Sarkar has started in recent years after the victory of the four party alliance headed by the BNP in the general election of 2001. In August 2002, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia announced the formation of the Gram Sarkar (Mallik 2004) and the bill was piloted in Parliament by the LGRD Minister, Mannan Bhuiyan, in February 2003. The proposed organisation, to be set up in every ward, would not be an administrative unit as defined in Section 152 (1) of the Constitution, but rather it would be a supporting unit of the UP (*The Bangladesh Observer*, February 17, 2003). The representatives of the organisation, however, would be selected. In an interview with *The Daily Star*, Mr Bhuiyan said the Gram Sarkar was an improved version of some previous attempts including the abolished Swanirbhar Gram Sarkar Provision of 1980, introduced by the former president Ziaur Rahman. It also drew elements from the Palli Parishad Act of 1989

formulated by the Jatiya Party, the Gram Parishad Act of 1997 by the Awami League and the recommendations of a local government commission formed in 1992.

The Protest and Government's Response

The initiative drew fire from all of the major political parties. An eminent lawyer, Dr Kamal Hossain, filed a writ challenging the legality of the Gram Sarkar Act 2003 on behalf of the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) on July 06, 2003. He argued that articles 3, 4 (4) of the Act, assented to by the President on February 27 2003, were contradictory to Articles 7, 9, 11, 27, 28, 29, 59 and 60 of the constitution. The High Court Division of the Supreme Court then served a show-cause notice on the government asking it to explain why the Act should not be declared illegal and beyond the constitution. The government replied to the notice (*The Daily Star*, August 03, 2003). On August 02, 2005 High Court declared the Gram Sarkar Act 2003 to be "illegal and unconstitutional". Since the law was enacted two years before, the coalition government had already constituted 39,786 Gram Sarkar units of the target to form 40,392 such non-elected bodies – which neither serve as part of the administration, nor of local government (*The Daily Star*, *The New Nation*, August 03, 2005). All of the Gram Sarkar units were formed through selection, comprising the supporters and activists of the ruling parties. In their budget, the government had allocated Tk 600 million for the Gram Sarkars, each of which has 13 members plus a headman and an adviser (*The Daily Star*, August 03, 2005).

Political Objectives of the Gram Sarkar Formation

In the course of constituting of the Gram Sarkar, many reports were published by the media providing evidence of the politicisation of the Gram Sarkar. Some highlights included (a) reference to a statement of a law-maker of the majority party of the coalition government that they would have to make sure to fill the Gram Sarkars with their party loyalists, (b) aspirants for membership of the Gram Sarkars started visiting the houses of ministers, (c) the government hurriedly constituted the Gram Sarkar for political gain (Ali, 2005). Chowdhury (2003) mentions irregularities in Gram Sarkar formation such as: keeping voters in the dark by allowing false voters, titular presence of the voters,[17]

[17] As there is no definite identity of voters in any administrative jurisdiction, government parties try to obtain their mandate in different ways in the elections held in their time. For instance, they hire voters who are proactive to them from neighbouring areas to cast votes in their favour. This is a very common picture

preparing the list of the Gram Sarkar in advance, influence of local BNP leaders, manipulation, and so on. Moreover, the government's hurry to form the Gram Sarkar, even after the writ, raises some suspicion in the public's mind. Many political parties strongly voiced their opposition to the Gram Sarkar. The Worker's Party went so far as to say that it would call a national convention against the Gram Sarkar (*New Age*, August 18, 2005). Its general secretary asserted that the Gram Sarkar "would just be a lower unit of the BNP and trigger an ultra-partisanship and anarchy in the rural areas".

The government's politics with the grassroots institutions are more evident by the recent activities of the BNP's Senior Joint General Secretary, Tarek Rahman. According to the daily newspapers, Tarek organised the grassroots assembly of the BNP activists at Union level by segmenting the country into 20 regions. In this three month long programme, which started on 04 January 2005 in Thakurgaon and ended on 30 March 2005 at Gazipur, Tarek strove to reorganise the BNP at the proletarian level by settling internal disputes and tried to come closer to them by breaking the hierarchy which, in turn, inspired the local leaders to work for the BNP targeting the next general election (*The Daily Ittefaq*, 08 January 2005). However, such assemblies have encouraged the BNP marginal activists and, specially the Gram Sarkar, to bypass the elected Union Parishad in different development activities, which is evident in my field observation and also in the literature.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the power struggles in Bangladesh and has determined that successive governments have tried to grasp power by virtue of abusing every possible means like corruption, nepotism, muscle power and so on, which is highly controversial in a democratic environment. If we summarise the features of the national elections (Table 2.1) and the nature of the successive regimes' power transfer (Table 2.2), we get an idea of political trends in Bangladesh. These give rise to one question: while the decentralisation of local government promises higher reflection of public opinion, how

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found in the dailies immediately after the elections in Bangladesh. The most recent example is the by-election of the Parliament for the Dhaka 10 constituency in which the government candidate won by a huge mandate.

can such government assure and/or execute a prosperous and fruitful flow of decentralisation?

Table 2.1: Features of the National Election

Year	Type	Officially reported to have been secured by the ruling party or the regime under which the poll was conducted	Features
1973	Parliamentary	97.6 % of seats	A*
1977	Referendum	98.9 % of votes	B & C
1978	Presidential	76.0 % of votes	B
1979	Parliamentary	69.6 % of seats	B
1981	Presidential	65.5 % of votes	B
1985	Referendum	94.0 % of votes	B & C
1986	Parliamentary	51.0 % of seats	B & C
1986	Presidential	84.0 % of votes	B & C
1987	Parliamentary	83.7 % of seats	B & C
1991	Parliamentary	Under caretaker government	A
1996 (Feb)	Parliamentary	84.3 % of seats	B & C
1996 (June)	Parliamentary	Under caretaker government	A
2001	Parliamentary	Under caretaker government	A

Source: Edited from Peiris (1998), Banglapedia Online

Features:

A = fair poll, results accepted without challenge;
B = extensive vote rigging and intimidation of voters;
C = Election boycotted by most of the opposition parties.
* = Please follow the description on page 18 and below this table.

The above table suggests vote rigging on almost every occasion unless under a caretaker government. Though the 1973 election was apparently fair, it was tailored in another way. While describing the election 1973, Peiris (1998, p. 48) argues that "*the election hustlings were not free of the crude exercise of muscle-power and other malpractices by the ruling party*". Again, both Peiris (1998) and Ahmed (2004) comment on the exercise of power by the Awami League against their main opposition the JSD, as described before. It seems that no political party has a sense of moral obligation to conduct a free and fair election. Of course, once the parties are immensely corrupted, they might not have that level of confidence to conduct a free and fair election. Again, if there is lack of transparency and accountability in the national administration system, the political parties might try to exploit every possible means to stay in power.

The above discussion indicates that the government, formed by whichever party, has always exploited local government according to their own formula for strengthening their

Table 2.2: Nature, Duration and Transfer of Power of Successive Governments

Period	Nature of the regime	Duration	Transfer of Power
10/01/72 to 28/12/74	The Awami League government headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with multi-party parliament	3 years	By declaring "the state of emergency"
25/01/75 to 15/08/75	The one party (BKSAL) rule under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman	7 months	Military coup and assassination of Mujib
15/08/75 to 21/04/77	Transition to military regime	1 year 8 months	By official order to change the power from military to political government under common ruler
21/04/77 to 30/05/81	Military regime headed by Ziaur Rahman	4 years 1 month	Military coup and assassination of Zia
30/05/81 to 24/03/82	Transition to military regime	10 months	Bloodless military coup
24/03/82 to 06/12/90	Military regime headed by Ershad	8 year 9 months	Popular upheavals
06/12/90 to 06/02/91	Caretaker Government	2 months	Peaceful transfer of power to democratically elected government
06/02/91 to 30/03/96	The BNP government headed by Khaleda Zia with multi-party parliament	5 year 2 months	Popular upheavals
30/03/96 to 12/06/96	Caretaker Government	2 months +	Peaceful transfer of power to democratically elected government
12/06/96 to 15/07/01	The Awami League government headed by Sheikh Hasina with multi-party parliament	5 year 1 month	Handed over to caretaker government
15/07/01 to 10/10/01	Caretaker Government	3 months	Peaceful transfer of power to democratically elected government
10/10/01 to 27/10/06	The four-party alliance headed by Khaleda Zia with multi-party parliament	5 years	Handover to controversial caretaker government (see chapter six)

power. They have tried to dominate to lowest tier of administration in the name of so-called decentralisation. According to Sirajul Islam, BAKSAL, as a system, aimed at achieving an exploitation-free and socialist economic and administrative order more or less close to spirit and practice of systems of government in contemporary socialist countries (Banglapedia Online). Again, the court said on Gram Sarkar "the concept is very noble, but its goals have to be achieved within the framework of the constitution, the court noted, adding, if the need for such a body is overwhelming, it could have been

achieved under the Union Parishad Ordinance" (*The Daily Star*, August 03, 2005). The country's political history suggests a lack of interest among successive governments to democratise the administration. The decentralisation policy, which apparently derives from a democratic environment, is assumed as an insecticide to kill the insects of corruption and autocracy. But, when these policies themselves turn up as a virus, what will be the fate of local government? The BKSAL of Mujib, the Gram Sarkar of the BNP during Zia and his widow's regime, the Upazila and Palli Parishad of Ershad and the Gram Parishad of Sheikh Hasina are like the same wine in different bottles and have all been used to centralise power in a putatively decentralisation process within Bangladesh. The question then, which is developed in the next chapter, is how we might conceptualise decentralisation in order to rethink local government in Bangladesh.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

INTRODUCTION

'Decentralisation' has a dictionary meaning of a mode of governance that distributes or transfers a certain level of power (authority and responsibility) from central government to regions, organisations and so on. Accordingly, decentralisation brings central government close to the local community and, thus, can be used as a functional synonym of 'democracy'. Decentralisation is not a new phenomenon of the modern state; it can be traced back to the eleventh century. Since the history of feudal lords and sovereign kings, centrally governing powers were decentralised in different situations and with various objectives. In Western Europe, the demand of 'liberty' on free-hold of property, toll-free access to markets and fairs and so on gave rise to a certain level of decentralisation and thus, some authority was given to a body-corporate or a group of individuals. However, Wickwar (1970) argues that "... *this legal personality was something that had not grown naturally, but had been artificially created by the sovereign; the body corporate was a persona ficta*" (p. 10). In South Asia, the Mughals, introduced four-tier local government headed by *Subadars* (Governors) in provinces, by *Shikdars* in Districts, by *Fauzders* in *Parganas* and *Matabbor* (Headmen) in villages (Siddiqui, 1992), which were mainly the tax administration units. Thus, it can be argued that decentralisation was a very strong tool to the ancient sovereigns to centralise their power bases.

In the twentieth century the major European powers 'exported' their systems of local government to the new developing countries (Wickwar, 1970; Humes, 1991), which was facilitated by colonialism, the influence of development assistance, and the aspiration of less developed countries to modernise by developing governmental systems similar to those of colonial powers with which they had been associated (described in section three). Added to this, particularly in the case of Bangladesh, there was the desire to grasp power (as illustrated in the previous chapter). However, in the early 1970s, the concept of 'decentralisation' diffused globally in different shapes, conceptualised by neoliberalism and politicised by the US and UK governments of President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher. Nowadays, decentralisation has become a prescription of good governance, poverty alleviation, economic sustenance and so on by academics and donor agencies. But, the perceptions of the concept vary substantially among countries, political ideologies, academics and donor agencies. For instance, the World Bank (2002) emphasises privatisation as a tool of decentralisation, whereas Manor (1999) denies

privatisation as a form of decentralisation. Again, some countries have pursued political devolution at all levels and some partial and/or a combination of both administrative and political decentralisation. In addition, though a considerable number of academics recognise administrative decentralisation as one form/aspect of decentralisation, Mawhood (1983) considers that to be deconcentration rather than decentralisation (Table 1). This chapter will deal with all of these debates and the author's argument will be extended in the following chapters.

This chapter will strive to conceptualise the different global practices of decentralisation. The first section introduces the concept of 'decentralisation' and hints at some of the debates that will be discussed in the following sections. Section two concentrates on the development of the new concept of 'decentralisation' from neoliberalism. Section three generalizes global forms of government and the distribution of power. This section will explore the vertical and horizontal (areal and functional) relationship of state power. Section four conceptualises the distribution of power and introduces the meaning of different forms of decentralisation and the following section illustrates its different aspects. Section five illustrates the positive outcomes of decentralisation all over the world. Section six explores considerations in pursuing a decentralisation plan. Finally, section seven concludes the chapter and comments on favourable circumstances for pursuing a decentralised local government policy.

NEOLIBERALISM

Decentralisation has experienced a new dimension since the early 1980s, influenced by global flows derived from neoliberal globalisation. Neoliberalism, derived from Keynesian welfare economy, is a term used to describe a variety of movements away from state control or protection of the economy, particularly beginning in the 1970s. Neoliberalism, often closely associated with particular governments and their economic doctrines in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand and India, argues that free markets, free trade, and the unrestricted flow of capital will produce the greatest social, political and economic good. This form advocates minimal government spending, minimal taxation, minimal regulations, and minimal direct involvement in the economy. It also ascribes a significant role in the governance of the

international economy to global financial institutions (World Bank, IMF, WTO), which play a major role in international development and thus in countries such as Bangladesh.

There are, of course, many critics of neoliberalism. According to Elizabeth Martinez and Arnoldo Garcia[18], who argue that the main points of neoliberalism include:

1. THE RULE OF THE MARKET. Liberating "free" or private enterprise from any bonds imposed by the government (the state) no matter how much social damage this causes. Greater openness to international trade and investment, as in NAFTA. Reduction of wages by de-unionising workers and eliminating workers' rights that had been won over many years of struggle. Eliminating price controls. All in all, total freedom of movement for capital, goods and services. To convince us this is good for us, they say "an unregulated market is the best way to increase economic growth, which will ultimately benefit everyone." This resembles Reagan's "supply-side" and "trickle-down" economics – but somehow the wealth did not trickle down very much.
2. CUTTING PUBLIC EXPENDITURE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES like education and health care. Reducing the safety-net for the poor and even the maintenance of roads, bridges, water supply – again in the name of reducing the government's role. Of course, they don't oppose government subsidies and tax benefits for business.
3. DEREGULATION. Reduced government regulation of everything that could diminish profits, including protection of the environment and job security.
4. PRIVATISATION. Selling state-owned enterprises, goods and services to private investors. This includes banks, key industries, railroads, toll highways, electricity, schools, hospitals and even fresh water. Although usually done in the name of greater efficiency, which is often needed, privatisation has mainly had the effect of concentrating wealth even more in a few hands and making the public pay even more for its needs.
5. ELIMINATING THE CONCEPT OF "THE PUBLIC GOOD" or "COMMUNITY" and replacing it with "individual responsibility". Pressuring the

[18] Both the writers attended the Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, held July 27 - August 03, 1996, in La Realidad, Chiapas.

poorest people in society to find solutions to their lack of health care, education and social security all by themselves – then blaming them, if they fail, as "lazy".

Thus, if the state devolves power to local hierarchies, more resource mobilisation will be accomplished. According to Peck and Tickell (2002), in the asymmetrical scale politics of neoliberalism, local institutions and actors were being given responsibility without power, where the international financial institutions and actors were gaining power without responsibility: a form of regulatory dumping [was] is occurring at the local scale, while macro-rule regimes [were] are being remade in regressive and marketised ways.

These broader trends in neoliberal governance provide an important backdrop to changes in governance in Bangladesh. As a recipient of World Bank development loans, Bangladesh has come under the purview of international neoliberal governance. In November 2005, for example, the World Bank cancelled three development projects after alleging corruption in the bidding process and Bangladesh was named the world's most corrupt country five years in a row up to 2005 by the global corruption watchdog, Transparency International (Rahman 2005). Local governance in Bangladesh, therefore, needs to be understood within the broader contexts of global neoliberalism, post-independence democratisation and prevailing structures of governance at the local level.

GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION OF POWER TO GOVERN

In general, global governmental power is distributed in two ways: spatially and functionally. On a spatial basis, governmental power associated with regional and local levels is distributed to lower, local tiers. Functionally, power is distributed among a number of specialized ministries, autonomous bodies and other agencies concerned with one or more related activities. The state distributes power to govern locally and their central agencies exercise power both spatially and functionally. The spatial and functional institutions depend upon each other (Figure 3.1); they supplement one another, they overlap, they compete and they conflict (Humes, 1991).

It is not obvious that the combination of both principles has to be same in all governmental activities; rather the nature of the activities determines the level of involvements of the principles. For instance, defence strategy and foreign affairs are supposed to be dealt with on the functional principle, as local communities do not have

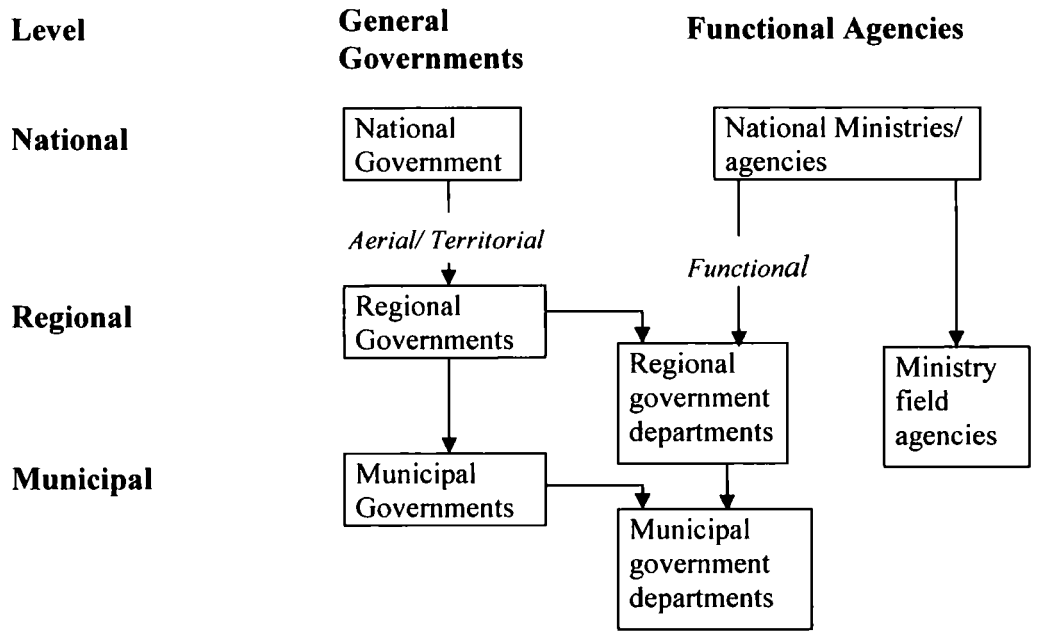


Figure 3.1: Distribution of Power: Aerial and Functional Channels (Humes, 1991).

any direct involvement with these kinds of activities. Accordingly, health, education, sanitation, and similar kinds of activities are more likely to be governed by local authorities where central authorities and their subordinate ministries provide some logistics through their field agencies. However, the combination of spatial and functional principles varies among different countries and this research will strive to explore the combinations in the Local Government of rural Bangladesh.

To study the local government system it is important to consider two criteria for distinguishing approaches, which are:

1. The extent to which hierarchical control is either inter-organisational or intra-organisational; and
2. The degree to which this control is focused in a single agency or spread among many functional or specialised hierarchies.

Here the extent of hierarchical control can be assumed as the degree to which the local bureaucratic chief relates to the hierarchical authority and to the local elected authority. From the previous chapter we learned that in Bangladesh the UP is apparently more areal than other upper local government tiers, as (theoretically) the UP is controlled by the Chairman who is elected by the elder voters of his constituency. Again, if we conduct a

time series analysis, we will find a spectrum extending from low to high hierarchical control in time as well as different tiers. However, Humes (1991) has generalised the global pattern of local government and identified four variations that may be noted:

1. Inter-organisational: A system that makes the local bureaucrats fully responsible to an elected local council instead of their upper hierarchical bureaucrats. Local government in the UK provides an example.
2. Hybrid (Subsidiarisation): A system in which the local executive is substantially responsible to the elected local council and, in addition, responsible to a higher bureaucratic authority to implement specific central policies. Germany and Japan have this type of local government.
3. Hybrid (Supervision): While the local executive is partially responsible to the elected local council and, for being a designated member from the central government, is directly loyal and responsible to it and supervised by it. This is termed Hybrid (Supervision). France, Colombia, Morocco have this kind of local government.
4. Intra-organisational (Subordination): In such a system the local government itself is a part of central hierarchy and, thus, fully subordinated to a central authority. Such local government system is/was practised in communist countries such as the former Soviet Union and China.

The local governments of different countries do not always fit exactly in the forms mentioned above. In practice, these categories blur and overlap as part of a single continuous spectrum.

Having described hierarchical control as the first criterion in distinguishing approaches to the study of local government, it is also important to identify the central control of local bodies, both elected and designated, that is focused in one central ministry or agency or is distributed among a number of specialised ministries and similar central operational agencies. Therefore, the following will illustrate the degrees of functional control. Similar to hierarchical control, four types of functional control can be traced as below:

1. More Areal: In this category, a central ministry or agency is responsible for overseeing the general purpose of local bodies and coordinating their activities with the help of functional ministries. The functional ministry, in principle,

communicates through the central ministry in its effort to advance and supervise local programmes. For instance, the education of local councils is coordinated by the central ministry with the help of the education ministry. Germany has this kind of practice.

2. Dual Areal: In this system, a general central body exercises the overall control of the local government and specific ministries/agencies direct specific local services; like China, whose central agency is the party bureaucracy.
3. Dual Functional: In this system the specialised body controls specific local services. The general purpose is supervised by the elected local bodies, which coordinate local affairs. This system maintains both the areal and the functional approach. For instance, the local unit of the specialised central agency is accountable to the elected local council as well as the upper hierarchy of the agency itself. The French system provides an example.
4. More Functional: A system in which specialised bodies directly provide and supervise specific local services. The central ministry has a relatively weak coordinating role in comparison to the functional bodies. For instance, a local unit of the specialised agency is fully accountable to the local elected authority and, thus, has the opportunity to work more independently, eliminating the central bureaucracy. The UK government adopted such a system.

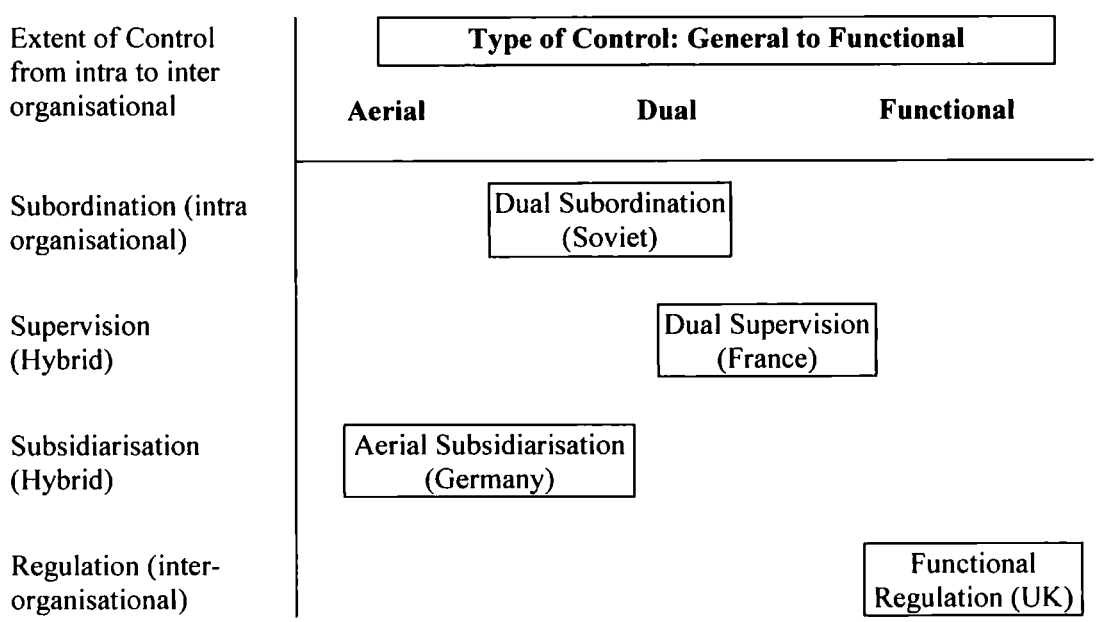


Figure 3.2: Four Traditional Approaches to Local Governance: A Conceptual Framework (Humes, 1991)

A continuum of the functional variety exists in different countries of the world. Again, different systems have different tiers of local government within a single country. Bangladesh is an example in this regard which is elucidated in the next chapter. The power distribution from areal to functional depends on a number of characteristics like local autonomy, fragmentation of local government structures, resource mobilisation and so on. It is important to know about the hierarchical and functional distribution of power before going to the broader context of meaning and concepts of decentralisation. If we place the hierarchical and functional divisions perpendicular to each other, it gives a clearer two dimensional picture of the distribution of power, as shown in figure 3.2. However, the local government systems in practice and in principle often vary within a country system, which is a major issue discussed in this research.

DECENTRALISATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Meaning and Concepts

Decentralisation and the development of democratic local governance continue quietly to sweep the world from Bolivia to Bulgaria, and, from West Africa to South Asia, a wide variety of countries are increasing the authority of local governments and working to make them more responsive and effective (Hossain, 2005). But in reverse, decentralisation can also be interpreted as counter-democratisation and a means for the centralisation of power, which mainly depends on the hidden political objectives of the central government (Hill, 1974). Decentralisation itself is popularly used as an umbrella term depicting at least three leading methods of shifting governance responsibilities from central to local levels: devolution, deconcentration and delegation.

In an operational sense, "*Decentralisation is the process of transferring power to the popularly elected local governments. It brings about change in the operation of institutions and almost invariably occurs gradually. Decentralisation requires the existence of elected local governments because local officials do not have meaningful autonomy unless they answer to constituents. Appointed local officials must ultimately act according to the interests of those in the national capital who gave them their jobs: they are effectively agents of the national government. A local system in which government officials are appointed, thus, is a centralised system that has not begun to decentralise*"

(p. 4).[19] Rondinelli et al. (1981) have generalised this definition. They argued that Decentralisation is the transfer of responsibility for planning, management and resource-raising and allocation from central government to (a) field units for central government ministries or agencies; (b) subordinate units or levels of government; (c) semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations; (d) area-wide regional or functional authorities; or (e) NGOs and Voluntary Organisations.

Table 3.1: Decentralisation in Brief

Terms[20] associated with	**Deconcentration**	**Decentralisation**
Organising Principles	Bureaucratic Decentralisation	Democratic decentralisation
	Administrative decentralised	Political decentralised
Structure in which the principle dominates	Field administrator	Local government
	Regional administrator	Local self-government
	Prefectoral administration	Municipal administration
Practice	Delegation of powers	Devolution of powers

Source: Mawhood, P. 1983. pp 3-4.

Devolution means empowering people politically, and it is often considered as the closest term to Decentralisation. Formally, devolution is the creation of or increased reliance upon lower units of central government with some degree of political autonomy, that are substantially away from central influence yet subject to general policies and laws, such as those regarding civil rights and the rule of law. Cheema and Rondinelli (1983) clarified the process of devolution by identifying five fundamental characteristics.

i) Powers are transferred to autonomous units governed independently and separately without the direct control of central government;

[19] Decentralisation and Democratic Local Governance Programming Handbook Centre for Democracy and Governance. Cited in Ellison (2004).

[20] The term 'deconcentration' is used both by the French writers and the United Nations Report; but 'Decentralisation' becomes 'devolution' in the United Nations Report.

ii) The units enjoy corporate status and powers to secure their own resources to perform their function;

iii) The units maintain control over a recognised geographical area;

iv) Devolution implies the need to develop local government institutions;

v) It is an arrangement of reciprocal, mutually beneficial and coordinate relationship between central and local government.

Panday (2005) questions whether the aforesaid characteristics are fundamental and argued that they seem to ignore any possibility that interests and aims are differentiated and uneven either in social or spatial terms.

Deconcentration denotes the transfer of power from the central administrative unit to its lower tiers. This means the redistribution of administrative powers and responsibilities. Ellison (2004) argues, "*Deconcentration is frequently the Decentralisation method preferred by national government personnel because it preserves control over resources and priorities. This may be true even where legal reforms seem to enable a political power shift more akin to devolution; central bureaucracies may actively put administrative mechanisms in place that in effect keep real control over resources and decisions in the hands of their regional offices*" (p. 4).

The United Nations advocated this form of Decentralisation because people will have a better understanding of government programmes, use the services offered, and eventually participate in using its resources. On the contrary, Mawhood (1983) argues that any hope of cracking open the blockages of central bureaucracy, curing managerial constipation and stimulating the whole nation to participate in national development plans ends in chaos and bankruptcy. Manor (1999) agrees and adds that "*When leaders in a central government transfer administrator to lower levels without subjecting them to influence from elected representatives at those levels, these administrators tend to remain loyal to those at the apex of the system. They enable central leaders' influence to penetrate more effectively into lower-level arenas – which in practice makes the political system more effectively centralised*" (p. 20). There is also the issue about what is deconcentrated/devolved. Very often this is about responsibility for service provision and

accountability, but budgets are not devolved and remain centralised. This creates "unfunded mandates" that make local government very difficult.

Delegation is the transfer of 'managerial responsibility' for a specific defined function outside the usual central government structure (Ellison, 2004) that is not completely controlled by the central government, but which is ultimately accountable to it (Hossain, 2005). It implies the transfer or creation of board authority to plan and implement decisions concerning specific activities within specific spatial boundaries to an organisation that is technically and administratively capable of carrying them out without direct supervision by a higher administrative unit (Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983; Panday, 2005). Ellison (2004) argues that delegation is weak if local governments have some reasonable measure of competency and experienced personnel. He added that, if local government is new to governance and/or without a basic skill base, delegation can be an effective means to start the process of Decentralisation by steadily shifting more and more management responsibility to local jurisdiction.

Many writers like Ellison (2004), Panday (2005), Hossain (2005), have often referred to **privatisation** and **deregulation** as two more forms of Decentralisation. According to them, privatisation is an arrangement that allows private agencies to plan and manage activities which were previously performed by the government. According to the World Bank Thematic Team, privatisation can include (Hossain, 2005):

i) Allowing private enterprise to perform functions that had previously been monopolised by government;

ii) Contracting out the provision or management of public services or facilities to commercial enterprise. There is a wide range of possible ways in which functions can be organised and many examples within public sector and public private institutional forms, particularly in infrastructure.

iii) Financing public sector programmes through the capital market (with adequate regulation or measures to prevent situations where the central government bear the risk for this borrowing) and allowing private organisations to participate; and

iv) Transferring responsibility for providing services from the public to the private sector through the divestiture of state-owned enterprise.

However, **deregulation** reduces the legal constraints on private participation in service provision or allows competition among private suppliers of services that in the past had been provided by government or by regulated monopolies. Manor (1999) denies that privatisation is a form of Decentralisation and gave two reasons for this. He argued that "*Privatisation often entails the horizontal transfer of tasks from the public to private sector, rather than a downward transfer (which is Decentralisation). And it often entails the transfer of tasks to private firms which are not local in character – to firms owned by people who operate at higher levels in the economy or sometimes even internationally. Neither constitutes Decentralisation*" (pp. 4-5).

It is very important for practitioners to understand the difference between these types of Decentralisation. This is, firstly, because, being widespread among donors and recipient countries, Decentralisation programming suffers from a popularization of its terms carelessly applied to many activities that are not related to Decentralisation. Secondly, when designing and implementing programmes, it is important that managers know which type of Decentralisation tools they are supporting and the likelihood that they can achieve their objectives with these tools. Thirdly, political realities and some good judgement usually dictate that a mix of these is more common than a singular approach. The above discussion dictates that each of the different forms of Decentralisation has a different implication for deferent organisational purposes in the degree of power and authority to be transferred, but the forms are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Dimensions of Local Government

There are three major dimensions of Decentralisation that are widely accepted as the essential attributes of power relations: administrative, political and financial Decentralisation.

The **administrative dimension** is sometimes called deconcentration. This is the full or partial transfer of an array of functional responsibilities, administrative personnel and resources from higher to lower levels. Thus, it often encourages bureaucracy. Shah and Thompson (2002) argues that "*Administrative Decentralisation requires lack of any ex ante controls over the decision to hire, fire and set terms of employment of local staff...Furthermore, local government should have the authority to pass bye-laws in their spheres of responsibility without having to obtain prior clearance from the higher level*

government" (p. 7). However, Manor (1999) and Mawhood (1983) argue that it is a means of centralizing power, as mentioned earlier. The administrative dimension is approximated by the degree of subdivision of the nation state, and by the size of country in terms of population (Braun and Grote, 2000).

The **political dimension** is synonymous with devolution. It involves the transfer of political authority to the popularly elected local level institutions through the establishment or re-establishment of elected local government, electoral reform, political party reform, authorisation of participatory processes, and other reforms (Decentralisation and Democratic Local Governance Programming Handbook). There are three insights in this definition. First, if local, elected government has been posited as a first – essential – step in establishing decentralised authority, it is highly unlikely that other legal and structural reforms can take root without elections actually being held. Second, while programming activities to support power shifts occasioned by decentralised reforms, we should not limit support for the central authorities to the area of policy reforms. Rather, we should also support whatever needs to happen within the operations of national agencies to enable these shifts. Third, political Decentralisation is usually the first step in the reform process and tends to get ahead of the financial dimension, while administrative changes can often lag behind both and are used as a means to slow the process by a recalcitrant national bureaucracy. Political Decentralisation aims to give citizens or their elected representatives more power in public decision-making. It is often associated with pluralistic and representative government, but it can also support democratization by giving citizens, or their representatives, more influence in the formulation and implementation of policies (World Bank Thematic Team). The political dimension is captured by the degree of Decentralisation in elections at all tiers of local government (Braun and Grote, 2000).

The **financial dimension** (often referred as to fiscal Decentralisation) entails the definition of authority over the raising of revenues or access to the transfer of, and making decisions on, current and investment expenditures (Braun and Grote, 2000; Manor, 1999; Ellison, 2004; Shah and Thompson, 2002). The fiscal dimension often lags far behind the political dimension. Ellison (2004) argues that this can happen because revenue-sharing formulae take time to calculate and restructure in centralised financial agencies, because national agencies charged with sharing resources resist doing so, or a host of other

reasons. He continues that resources are always limited, so the criticism that the local does not get enough resources can often be a straw man, because such resources do not exist at any level. Fiscal Decentralisation can be assumed from the share of sub-national expenditure in relation to that at the national level (Braun and Grote, 2000).

All the aforesaid forms and dimensions of decentralisation have their deficiencies. Again, no individual form or dimension can satisfy the entire decentralisation process of a country, as the context varies with every country. A mix of concepts is usually apparent in any given context. Giving an example from the Ukraine, which has adopted devolution in its local government system, the UNDP (2005) reveals that it has been a challenge for a weak, unstable central government to keep local governments functioning with vastly shrunken resources and little or no civil society engagement at the local level. More complexly, different concepts even prevail in different tiers of a particular country. For instance, some tiers may be constituted by devolution and some other tiers may be confined with only deconcentration or/and delegation. In addition, the devolution may be limited in terms of the political dimension and may have a lag in terms of the financial dimension. Thus, a cross-section of forms and dimensions of decentralisation gives a more accurate picture of the level of decentralisation of any particular country.

Elucidation of the Meaning of Decentralisation

The above discussion gives a more general idea about the forms and dimensions of decentralisation. The following paragraph will detail what decentralisation is and what it is not.

What Decentralisation is:

1. **A counter point to globalisation:** In the second section of this chapter it is argued that the recent flow of decentralisation is indirectly developed from the concept of globalisation, but in definition, decentralisation is a counter point to globalisation (Hossain, 2005), because, globalisation often moves from the local to the national and global spheres of multination or non-national interest. On the contrary, decentralisation brings the decision-making back to the regional and local levels. In this connection, it is important to mention that the perception of

decentralisation varies among the global financial institutions and academics which are already mentioned.

2. **An integral part of democratisation:** the ideal decentralisation can be referred to as an integral part of democratisation. If the power is devolved to the elected autonomous local bodies with allocation of financial resources, it is likely to be more democratised. Otherwise, decentralisation might be used by the central body as a strong tool to bureaucratise power. Therefore, it is very important to identify decentralisation in theory and in practice.
3. **Involvement of multiple actors and sectors:** Decentralisation efforts are strongly influenced by a country's size, population, history, political climate and geographic entity, social sectors and actors and ethnic diversity. The geographic entity includes international, national, sub-national and local; the social sector includes public and private sector and civil society and social sector includes development themes such as political, legal, social, cultural, administrative, environmental and so on. These differences call for different arrangements between central and sub-national levels, including devolution, delegation and deconcentration. For example, in a state with ethnic diversity different forms of local government might be needed considering the politics, culture and tradition of the particular region.
4. **A combination of dimensions:** Hossain (2005) explains that decentralisation is a combination of four dimensions – the collective/exterior, the collective/interior, the individual/exterior and the individual/interior. In the collective group, the exterior dimension deals with the institutional and legal forms and procedures and the interior deals with the social culture – the set of values and assumptions, which are often unspoken and unacknowledged but, nevertheless, play a powerful role in human relationships. The individual group, both in exterior and interior levels is deep-rooted at the micro-scale; it is the context for the individual's mindset, mental models, emotions, individuals within the institution, and so on.
5. **Central control over decentralised procedures:** A debate prevails about whether decentralisation is a means of centralising power, as described earlier. Referring to the gap between de jure and de facto equality, McEwan (2002) emphasises the pluralisation of politics. She interprets good governance as requiring local government to liaise with communities before making decisions,

and to promote the rights and duties of communities to govern, which will result in a more radical version of governance at the local level.

What Decentralisation is not:

1. **An alternative of centralisation:** It is evident from the literature on third world countries that a decentralisation policy is frequently adopted in order to centralise power, which is contradictory to the spirit of the term. Hill (1974) strives to differentiate the national power structure from the government service delivery and argues that local government is concerned with citizens' micro-level interests, which is apart from the national power structure. He, ultimately, tries to make the distinction of two terms: 'local government' and 'local self-government'. However, in theory, decentralisation refers the latter, which is not an alternative to the centralisation of power.

Driving Forces of Decentralisation

Braun and Grote (2000) have identified the internal and external pressures and demands for Decentralisation:

- *Regional Political Freedom, Participation and Conflict Resolution*: Decentralisation is seen as a way to reconnect central regimes to social groups from which they have become increasingly divorced (Manor, 1999).
- *Pressure of Global Competition*: Decentralisation, curiously enough, is not just a parallel trend of globalisation, but is very much driven by it.
- *Demand for Stabilisation*: A response from the regional and local level is to gain power over protective and stabilissation related policy instruments.
- *Demand for Equity and Efficiency in Local Public Services*: Partly related to the forces of global competition, mentioned above, major changes in development strategies have been adopted by many countries.

WHAT CAN DECENTRALISATION DO?

Decentralisation involves a central government transferring to local entities some of its political authority and, crucially, some of its resources and administrative responsibilities. These local entities then provide some basic public services and functions. It is widely believed that decentralisation increases popular participation in decision-making because it brings government closer to people, making it more accessible and more knowledgeable about local conditions and so more responsive to people's demands. But does the evidence support this idea? More importantly, does decentralising authority and resources help advance the pro-poor agenda? When decentralisation initiatives are pursued with appropriate institutions and resources, they mobilize pressures from civil society and engaged citizens. Such reforms can yield significant benefits not just for poor and excluded groups but also for governments. In recent years a wide variety of countries in transition and developing, solvent and insolvent, authoritarian and democratic, with governments of the left, right and centre - have pursued decentralisation. Decentralisation has worked - as in parts of Botswana, Brazil, Colombia, Jordan, South Africa and many states in India (Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal), which can be traced from significant improvements as below:

• ***Faster response to local needs***. In the definition, decentralisation is unanimously argued as the means to break down the national hierarchy and, thus, to bring the government closer to the common people. Therefore, if a national administrative system is decentralised, local authorities tend to act more in line with local preferences and conditions, and no longer have to wait for permission from higher levels before acting. Decentralisation also provides opportunities for women to participate at the local level, enabling a more gender-sensitive approach to policy formulation and implementation. Moreover, education, rehabilitation, nutrition and health and so on – central programmes become more widely used as it is easier for the locally elected representatives than bureaucrats to explain the rationale for them in terms so that local people can understand and contributing significantly to the success of those programmes. Decentralised entities are more efficient at delivering services than top-down bureaucratic hierarchy because local planning and participation ensure stronger links between interventions in health, education, water and sanitation and other services

• ***Better information flows***. Once the local councils are governed by the elected representatives and the central hierarchy become more flexible, it is assumed to increase the information flow automatically and significantly. In general, the democratic practice and fair competition among the political parties helps to increase the information flow from centre to the local level. On the other hand, the bottom-up information flow also increases as the decentralisation provides bureaucrats with early warnings of potential disasters—disease outbreaks, floods, droughts—and allows empowered local authorities to take swift remedial action. For example, in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh, India, a rural community intranet project, Gyandoot, started in January 2000, enabling prompt responses to an early e-mail warning and so preventing an outbreak of a cattle epidemic (UNDP, 2005).

• ***More accountability and transparency, and less corruption***. Better information flow eventually brings the transparency, makes the government more accountable and, thus, reduces corruption. Because decentralisation tends to enhance transparency, the amount of money corruptly diverted from development programmes often declines in countries that pursue it. A recent study of UNDP 55 countries found that decentralisation of government spending is closely associated with lower corruption among bureaucrats and reduced rent seeking by private parties – leaving more money to spend on basic services for poor people (UNDP, 2005).

• ***Improved delivery of basic services***. Decentralisation can make a particularly big difference in the provision of social services. It facilitates community participation in decision-making and can help resolve issues related to sharing the costs of service delivery. For example, the Bamako Initiative has ensured the supply of essential drugs to remote rural communities in Mali and helped identify poor community members who cannot cover certain costs (UNDP, 2005).

In a bureaucratic or subordinate system, as the local level government officials are not responsible and accountable to the local council, they often might misuse the privilege/system. Dual and/or political decentralisation often reduces such irresponsibility among government employees in local service centres like schools and health clinics because, on the basis of complaints received from their constituents, elected local officials can impose discipline. Thus basic service delivery is improved without any additional

cost. Increased accountability also encourages local people to monitor programme implementation and to protest when government employees perform badly.

• ***More sustainable projects.*** Decentralisation makes development projects more sustainable because local people are more likely to be involved in their design, execution and monitoring. In addition, participatory budgeting and accounting enhance efficiency and transparency and make projects more gender responsive.

• ***Stronger means for resolving conflict.*** A study by the UNDP (2005) reveals that empowering regions and localities helps promote national unity and resolve conflicts, as in Ethiopia and Rwanda. The same study argues that in Namibia and South Africa decentralisation was undertaken to redress inequalities among regions. Reallocating resources ensured a more equitable distribution of national funds to regions previously neglected by dominant groups at the centre. It also enabled debate and renegotiation on the allocation of national resources - a source of long-standing conflicts between regions and ethnic groups.

• ***Increased energy and motivation among local stakeholders.*** Once the central system is decentralised, it ultimately reduces the workload which characterised the centralised hierarchical system. More participation of people also reduces the workload and endeavours to generate more innovative ideas to find solutions to their everyday problems. In addition, the central government can also concentrate on more national issues rather than the local, which also improves their efficiency.

• ***Expanded opportunities for political representation.*** Decentralisation provides people with a much stronger voice in public policy decisions that affect their lives. In particular, it has increased representation among women (as in India one-third of council seats are reserved for women at the *panchayat* and nowadays in Bangladesh, at the Union Parishad and the Pourashava election one third of the members are elected women) and among previously marginalized ethnic groups (such as the Quechua and Aymara communities in Bolivia, the Kalingas and Gaddangs communities in the Philippines and rural ethnic groups like the Songhai and Dogon in Mali) (UNDP, 2005).

• ***Improved Implementation and Monitoring of Service Delivery.*** Decentralisation also improves implementation and monitoring of service delivery and expedites responses to

bad performance. Around the world, increased transparency and improved scrutiny have reduced both the level of corruption and the scale of embezzlement. Thus, political power is no longer concentrated solely in the hands of national elites. Therefore, all state employees, including local elected representatives, civil servants or service personnel, are held accountable not just to the most powerful segments of society but also to the poorest citizens who elect the government. Such a setup is critical when planning policy interventions for the enhanced growth of the nation.

CONSIDERATIONS IN DESIGNING A DECENTRALISED PLAN

Any Decentralisation attempts must have some considerations, such as the following:

i. **Consider the existing cultural elements**: Before introducing any decentralisation tool to any particular area it is important to consider the cultural elements of that particular community - the images, assumptions and internal psycho-social expectations of the population regarding the issues of authority, the role of government, the role of the citizen, conflict, consensus, power, the role of elites, the role of the poor, the role of women, and a host of other issues. For example, India has adopted the *Panchayat* in their local government system, which has a long tradition.

ii. **Consider changing relationships:** This might appear to conflict with the above as in major parts of the world efforts at local government were being made by generalised global prescription, eliminating their own traditions. However, this changing relationship does not necessarily mean to generalise a national system by example from the first world, rather to focus on the spatio-temporal changes of power structures among different socially interacting actors within that particular territory. These changes can be threatening or can be seen as enabling for all parties in a win-win situation.

iii. **Consider timing and sequence:** Decentralisation is long-term effort in which timing and phasing are crucial. The UNDP (2005) suggests pursuing the decentralisation policies according to the capacity of the existing government structures and to move from bureaucratic to more democratic structures step-by-step instead of directly devolving power to the local level. Hill (1974) discusses the French structure, where power is given to the local authorities according to their ability to carry them out. So, before making a plan of Decentralisation, time sequences need to be considered.

iv. **Consider enhancing mechanisms of participation and partnership:** Decentralisation is increased in effectiveness through mechanisms of full participation and partnership. Participation must involve all the societal actors playing their optimal and legitimate roles in policy formulation, resource management and service provision.

v. **Consider the mental model that is being used:** Decentralisation as a term comes from a mental model containing a centre and a periphery. This is only a model, just as a pyramidal social structure is only a mental model. When we view a society as a whole system, we do not see vertical layers (as in a pyramid) or concentric layers (as in the concentric model), but rather a horizontal-environment with autonomous yet interrelated actors, sectors, and geographical areas.

CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a generalised review of the theoretical ideas about the decentralisation of local government. Since there has been an emergence of demand for decentralisation among local communities in different contexts around the world, the process has been subject to negotiations about power. Thus, decentralisation is fundamentally political. Decentralisation can be brought to any country if there is political will from the leadership and there is political cooperation from bureaucrats within particular regions. This usually depends in part upon the degree to which political and bureaucratic staff thoroughly agree on the strategy's long term advantages and commit to the process needed to make the transition to a decentralised system. Another important issue is the enabling environment for decentralisation, which incorporates the capacity of political leaders and bureaucrats, to mobilise civil society, and to generate long-term commitment to sustain the shift in government. The next chapter explores issues surrounding processes of decentralisation in the formation of the structures and functions of rural government in Bangladesh.

Chapter Four

Structures and Functions in Rural Local Government in Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Though the major political parties of Bangladesh unanimously agree that to meet the development demands of the grassroots, there is no alternative but to strengthen the local government institutions. However, when the question has been raised to devolve power to local government institutions and/or to strengthen them, governments have always been confused in their political decisions. Alam, Haque and Westergaard (1994) argue that decentralisation policies are usually presented and debated in the technical language of administrative efficiency and/or constitutional principles, whereas in fact they represent political objectives that are rarely made explicit. In the parliamentary elections of 2001 both the major political parties, the Awami League and the BNP, had a manifesto commitment to establish elected Upazila Parishads but, unfortunately, after the election this was kept in cold storage. In an interview with the BBC Bangla Division on 1st December 2005, the then minister of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (LGRD&C), Mr Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, said that that the delay was due to 'some problems'. However, he confirmed this election would be carried out in future as both the Awami League and the BNP agreed upon this point. However, a discussion series on local government on BBC Bangla radio in December 2005 identified some obstacles in decentralising the local government of Bangladesh, as follows:

- Enormous politicisation of the local government institutions;
- Scarce of resources of the local government institutions;
- Dependence upon the central government for resources;
- Ascribed dependence, in the name of hierarchy, between the local government tiers;
- Vicious cycle of bureaucratic administration at local level.

Theoretically, the local government system is not a bureaucratic body but formed by a public mandate. This elected body assumes power, which comes through legislation from the state. However, they have another duty, which is to aggregate and unite the people. It is often difficult to aggregate people in formal structures as eight out of ten people in rural Bangladesh have little access to the formal institutions (Islam, 2002). Therefore, informal institutions have room to influence most of the country's population in their regular livelihoods. Westergaard (2000) and Westergaard and Alam (1995) explain the role of

informal institutions in settling local problems, such as uniting conflicting groups together in the local interest.

This chapter strives to outline the existing local government structures and their functions. The first section describes the formal local government institutions and the second section focuses on the informal institutions.

FORMAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT INTITUTIONS

The local government of Bangladesh can be divided into two main types: i) rural and ii) urban. All of the political regimes so far have experimented with their own decentralisation therapy and tried to innovate with new combinations of local government tiers and, finally, bureaucracy was given a free hand after the abolition of the Upazila system in 1991. There are debates between the bureaucrats and the civil society in fixing the number of tiers required for a well governed local government system. Former Secretary of the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs Mujibul Haque said on BBC Bangla radio (February 2007) that the reconstitution of the Zila Parishad by dissolving the Upazila Parishad would be more effective; he identified two underlying causes for this:

- As the number of upazila is too high (approximately 500), the governance at this level might be diluted; and
- Upazila lags with the depth of operation as the UP and the Zila exists in its immediate lower and upper hierarchy.

In the same programme, Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, a promising economist, rejected this argument by attacking bureaucrats for their efforts to grasp power through the Zila system. However, in this section we will discuss the formal local government structure according to the latest legislation. The rural local government as proposed in May 1997 by the most recent commission on local government was to have four tiers:

- Gram (Village) Parishad[21], (40,000);

[21] Gram Parishad was proposed in the Local Government Institutional Strengthening Report in May 1997, during the Awami League Regime, by the then Local Government Commission. However, the successive BNP regime passed the Gram Sarkar Act 2003 in parliament. Therefore, the Gram Parishad will be discussed under the heading of Gram Sarkar.

- Union Parishads (4480);
- Thana/Upazila Parishads (460);
- Zila (District) Parishads (64).

Here, the Union is the lowest administrative unit and is itself divided into nine parts, each called a Gram or Ward. The immediate upper hierarchy of the Union is Thana/Upazila which consists of 10-15 Unions. Accordingly, a Zila is usually constituted by 10-15 Upazilas. It is important to mention that it is difficult to distinguish an Upazila and a Zila under rural local government. This is because, according to the Zila Parishad Ordinance 2000, the Pourashava or Municipality and the Wards of a City Corporation within a Zila will be administered by that particular Zila Parishad. Again, the Upazila Parishad Act 1998 confirms a composition of the Union Parishads and the Pourashavas under its

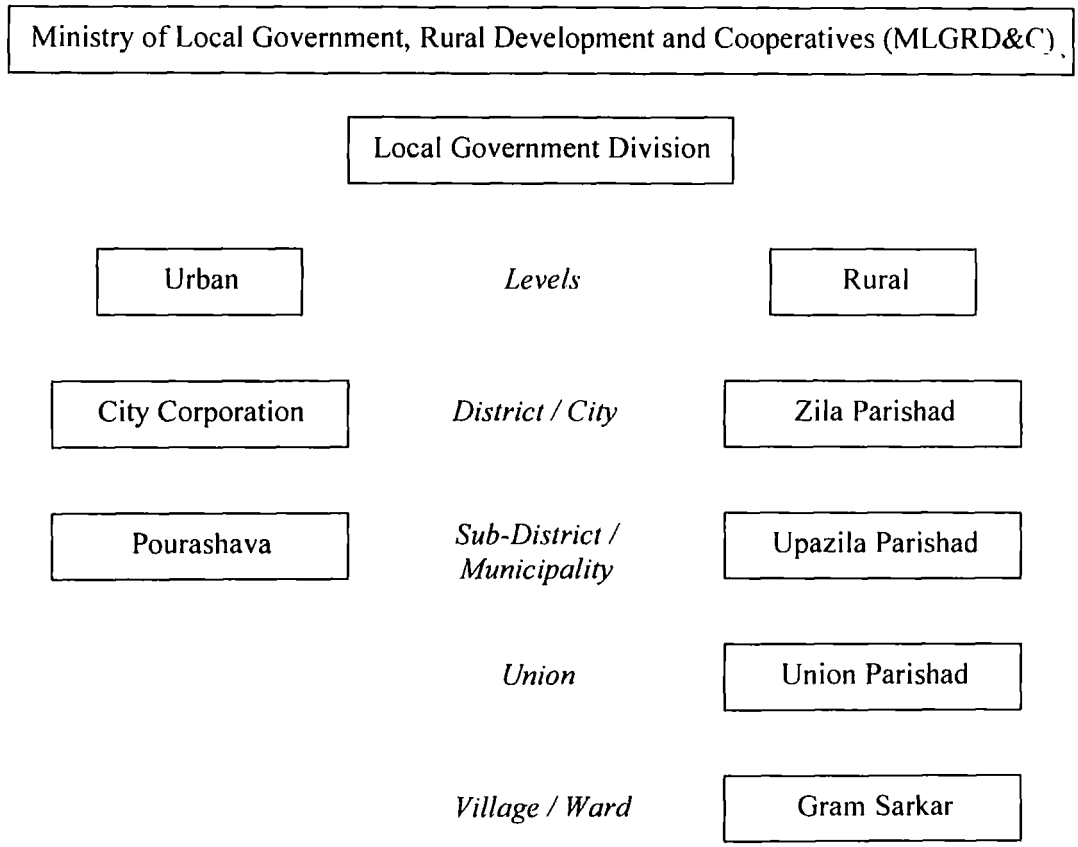


Figure 4.1: The Hierarchy of Local Government in Bangladesh

jurisdiction. However, as this thesis is only focusing on the rural local government of Bangladesh, I will not pursue any elucidation of urban local government beyond a little discussion in the next paragraph.

Urban areas have a separate set of local governments. The Bangladesh Census Commission recognized 522 urban areas in 1991 (with a population of about 5000 or more) but only about 289 of the larger urban areas among these have urban local governments named Pourashava or Municipality, which again are classified according to financial strength. The six largest cities have City Corporation status. In addition, there are also some urban centres that are governed by the military under Cantonment Boards. A large number of small urban centres are administered under the Union Parishad system of (rural) local government as they have not yet been declared a Municipality.

Gram Sarkar

Clause number 8 of the Union Parishad Ordinance 1983 is refashioned by law amendment number 20 of 1993, which divided the Union Parishad into nine wards instead of three. The demarcation of the wards is made by the lowest unit of the land use map, which is called the 'Mouza'. A Mouza consists of one or more parts of a village. A Union Parishad consists of 10-15 villages. The higher number of villages in a Union Parishad, the greater are the physical distances and the potential alienation of communities from participation in the regular activities and development efforts of the Union Parishad. Making the administrative units of the upper hierarchies more participatory, with democratic grassroots participation, is essential and can be achieved by organising the people at that level. This philosophy was politicised by Ershad's Polli Parishad Act 1989, Hasina's Gram Parishad Act 1997 and, finally, Khaleda's Gram Sarkar Act 2003. Though the Gram Sarkar was declared illegal and unconstitutional by the High Court on 02 August 2005, it is incorporated in this section as every political regime wants such an organisation. The following paragraphs will focus on the latest act: the Gram Sarkar Act 2003, which replaced the Local Government (Gram Parishad) Act 1997.

Structure of the Gram Sarkar:

According to the clause 4 of the Gram Sarkar Act (2003), the structure of the Gram Sarkar is as follows:

1. One headman, one advisor and thirteen members of a ward will constitute the Gram Sarkar of the ward;

2. The elected UP member from the ward will be the headman and the UP member for the reserved seat will be the advisor;
3. The UP member from the reserved seat will be the advisor for all three Wards for her constituency;
4. The members of the Gram Sarkar will be:
   a. One respected person;
   b. Three women members, including one trained member from the Village Defence Party (VDP);
   c. One trained male member from the Village Defence Party (VDP);
   d. One peasant ;
   e. Two landless peasants;
   f. One member from cooperatives;
   g. One freedom fighter;
   h. One teacher;
   i. One businessman; and
   j. One doctor or any serviceman.

   However, if the members are not available from any of the aforesaid groups the difference will be covered by increasing the number from group d.

5. The members will be selected by verbal vote of at least one-tenth of the adult franchisees of the ward and will be coordinated by the UNO (Chief executive of the Upazila) or the Circle Officer or their appointed employee. However, if there is any argument about any member, the decision of the coordinator will be final.

Function of the Gram Sarkar

According to the clause 16 of the Gram Sarkar Act 2003, the functions of the Gram Sarkar are as follows:

a. Make plans for development of local roads, bridges, culverts etc. and review the progress and financial matters of existing projects;
b. Maintain law and order and control terrorism, violence against women, etc. and to submit reports to the UP;

c. Monitor governmental efforts on the elimination of illiteracy, observe the curriculum of primary and Madrasa educational institutes and submit reports to the UP;
d. Motivate parents to send their children to school and create better awareness for adult and female literacy and submit reports to the UP in any failure of such motivation;
e. Cooperate with the authority involved in the primary healthcare activities, including nutrition and immunisation, and report to the UP about the activities of the fieldworkers on those programmes;
f. Cooperate with the authority involved in the family planning activities and report to the UP about the activities of the fieldworkers working on those programmes;
g. Provide adequate support for the pure water and sanitation programmes;
h. Collect primary statistics on births-deaths registration, marriages etc. and submit them to the UP;
i. Be informed on fertilizer, insecticide and seed distribution and tell the UP and respective authorities of any shortage;
j. Provide support to the law and order authorities and settle disputes within the ward;
k. Initiate activities to develop the sports and cultural sector;
l. Encourage cooperatives, small entrepreneurs, poultry, fisheries and livestock farms for the economic development of the village;
m. Encourage and initiate tree plantation programmes;
n. Instigate any welfare activities for the overall development of the village including child and women's affairs;
o. Supervise the VGD and VGF activities within the village;
p. Accomplish all other activities which are initiated by the government from time to time.

The headman and the advisor of the Gram Sarkar will be responsible for 'a' and 'b' of the above-mentioned activities and each member will be responsible for each of the remaining activities. If the position of the advisor remains or becomes vacant, the advisor will be responsible for both 'a' and 'b' and s/he will assign a

member for additional activity if any position of the members remain or become vacant.

Sources of Income:

The UP will bear all the associated costs for the activities of the Gram Sarkar, like registration of birth, death, marriage, divorce and so on, which are listed in the activities of the UP.

Union Parishad

The Union parishad is the oldest and lowest level of the local government system. It has been functioning for more than a hundred years for the rural development of the country. There are 4480 Union parishads, which are run by the directly elected representatives. Its roles and representatives are guided by different levels, rules and circulars that are made from time to time.

Structure of the UP:

1. Chairman: One chairman of Union Parishad directly elected by the voters of the Union.

2. Members: Nine members elected from the nine wards constituting the Union.

3. Women members: Three seats are reserved for women. Each of the woman members is directly elected by the male and female voters of three wards within a Union.

4. Official members: The Block Supervisor (Directorate of Agriculture), Health Assistant, Family Planning Assistant, Family Welfare Worker, Ansar/VDP and all other field staff of government departments working at Union level (for example, UP secretary) are official members of the Union Parishad but they have no voting rights.

5. Others members: Representatives of freedom fighters, Cooperative Societies, disadvantaged groups/trades, i.e. weavers, fishermen, landless workers, destitute women, etc) are members of the Union Parishad without voting rights.

Functions of the UP

1. Preparation of a comprehensive Union Plan and inclusion of inter-ward development projects after identification and prioritization.
2. To assist and cooperate in the development of primary schools, supervise their functioning and motivate people for spreading literacy.
3. Ensure provision of health services at the Union Health Centres, supervise family planning-related activities and services and monitor the same. Arrange for a supply of safe drinking water and promote sanitation programmes.
4. Construction of inter-ward roads, maintenance of the same, management of small scale irrigation and water resources.
5. Implementation of afforestation programmes along the Union Parishad roads and all earthen embankments.
6. Peaceful resolution and amicable settlement of inter-ward disputes.
7. Promote social resistance over violence against women, terrorism, all types of crimes and cooperate with the administration and maintenance of law and order.
8. Up-to-date registration of birth, death and marriages based on reports received from the Gram Parishad.
9. Assist the Upazila parishad in the preparation of inter-ward agricultural and fisheries development projects and take the necessary action.
10. Cooperate with and advise all agencies within the Union having credit programmes and help rural poor to participate in the same.
11. Increase awareness for women and child development and take concrete actions where necessary.
12. Encourage people to undertake cottage industries with good potential and facilitate the involvement of disadvantaged and poor people in various income generating activities.

Upazila Parishad

The Upazila Parishad (Sub-District) is an important unit of administration in Bangladesh. Most of the Upazilas have now been developed with infrastructures into fully-fledged administrative centres, particularly during the period when the Upazila Parishad was, for the first and only, functioning as a local government body (1982-1991). Though the

Upazila Parishad system was abolished in 1991, yet for the greater interest of public services, there was a strong justification and necessity for establishing a local government body at the Upazila level. The principles of good governance require that the activities of government departments must be brought under the supervision of public representatives and thereby give a broader scope of public participation. In view of the above reasons, the Government felt the urge to reintroduce Upazila system and, in 1998, the Upazila Parishad Act 1998 was passed in the Parliament. This Act came into force on 1st February 1998 by notification in the official Gazette.

Structure

According to this act, an Upazila Parishad consists of:

a. A chairman directly elected by the voters of the Upazila;
b. All chairmen of the Union Parishads and Pourashavas, if any, under the jurisdiction of the concerned Upazila are members of the Parishad; and
c. The women's seats numbering one-third of the total number of Unions and Pourashavas are reserved and the women members/commissioners of Union Parishads and Pourashavas elect these members among themselves.

Period of Upazila Parishad

The term of the Parishad is 5 years from its first meeting. The Upazila Nirbahi Officer, the chief executive of the Parishad deputed by the Government is the Secretary o. the Upazila Parishad.

Standing Committees

For smooth functioning, the Upazila Parishad has seven standing committees:

a. Law and Order
b. Health and Family Planning
c. Agriculture, Irrigation and Environment
d. Education
e. Social Welfare, Woman and Child Development
f. Communication and Infra-structural Development

Functions

At present (January 2007) there are 469 Upazilas in 64 Districts under 6 Divisions.

As in the previous system, functions at the Upazila level are divided into two categories, namely "retained" and "transferred". The regulatory functions and the major development activities, which are of national and regional scope, are retained by the National Government. According to Upazila Parishad Act 1998 functions entrusted to the parishad include:

1. Preparation of Five Year Development Planning and development planning for different periods.
2. Implementation of activities of Government departments transferred to the Parishad, monitoring and
3. Co-ordinating the functions of those departments
4. Construction, maintenance and repair of inter-union connecting roads.
5. Ensuring optimum utilizations of surface water through small scale irrigation schemes and implementing the same.
6. Ensuring public health, nutrition and family planning services.
7. Development of sanitation and sewerage works and ensuring the supply of pure drinking water.
8. Motivation work for expansion of education and assistance for the same.
9. Supervision and monitoring of Secondary and Madrasa (schools for Islamic religious studies) education.
10. Promoting cottage and small industries and providing assistance for its success.
11. Assistance in the activities of Co-operative Societies and NGOs and co-ordination of the same.
12. Co-operation in and implementation of programmes for the development of child, women and social welfare and provision of assistance for promoting youth, sports and cultural activities.
13. Undertaking programmes for the development of agriculture, livestock, fisheries and forest resources.
14. Reviewing the law and order situation and the activities of the Police Directorate and regularly submitting reports to the concerned higher authorities.

15. Promotion of self-employment activities, providing assistance for poverty alleviation programmes, and assisting the government in the implementation of its programmes.
16. Providing necessary help and co-ordinating the activities of the Union Parishads.
17. Guiding public opinion and taking other defensive measures against the offences of woman & child torture/oppression.
18. Taking measures to encourage public opinion against offences like terrorism, theft, robbery, illegal trafficking, use of drugs and so on.
19. Facilitating different programmes, including social forestry, for the preservation and development of the environment.

Zila Parishad

The chairman and the members of the council are directly elected for a five year term. However, the elected Zila Parishad has never seen the light in any regime and bureaucrats have as a result dominated this institution since its birth. In addition, there are debates on the essence of this institution.

The structure of the Zila Parishad is:

1. A Chairman;
2. Fifteen members; and
3. Five female members in reserved seats.

The Chairman, members and female members are (in theory) elected by the specific voters defined under the clause 17 of the Zila Parishad Act 2000, which is described below:

Clause 17:

1. The Mayor and the commissioners of city corporation (if one exists), the Upazila chairmen, the chairmen and commissioners of the municipal corporation, the chairmen and members of the UP under the jurisdiction of the concerned district will be eligible to vote to select the Chairman and the members of the Zila Parishad;

2. The election commission should provide a voters' list for each ward;

3. None should have the right to vote except the voters as mentioned in subparagraph '1' of clause 17.

4. Being a member of any institution, as described in subparagraph 1, a potential voter loses his/her right to vote.

INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS IN RURAL BANGLADESH

'Institution' means 'a regular pattern of behaviour' or 'a way to get things done'. Formal institutions are structured organisations and committees, such as government departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Informal institutions are more difficult to understand; these incorporate issues such as culture, power relations, religious customs and other social norms. The literature on the rural local government of Bangladesh focuses on the particular mix of formal and informal institutions, which is a key determinant of development outcomes. Again, in policy and practice there are considerable difficulties in articulating formal organisational realities with the rules and norms embedded in informally constructed social structures. However, a field study conducted by the author presents a complex scenario in this regard. This study is concerned with the women who were the primary beneficiaries of the RMP. A brief on the RMP is given in the next chapter. The case studies of two women, one successful and one failed, will help us to find the interactions between the formal and the informal structures:

Jahanara Begum: A Success Story

Before being selected for the RMP roadwork Jahanara had been staying with her disabled husband, three daughters and only infant son in her father-in-law's house, which was hypothecated at that time. She used to earn wages from household work and paddy husking in neighbours' houses. Then, a four year job in the RMP and seven months in the Post-Flood Rehabilitation Project (PFRP)[22] have supported her to make every endeavour to change her life. The job in the RMP and a loan from the PFRP helped her to accrue a good amount of savings along with the mandatory savings.

[22] The PFRP was a CARE initiated project which provided loan to the flood victims without imposing any interest on the loan.

After graduating from the RMP, she had added together her mandatory saving of 7000 taka, 13,000 taka savings from her RMP wages over four years and a loan of 20,000 taka from neighbours and, at last, was able to purchase her existing homestead land, which, she feels, has given her much mental relief and helped to boost her potential. When she was asked to describe how the homestead land would boost her potential, she replied that this land was like a base to her which had assured her shelter. She further added that a homeless person never feels that they can move forward. In addition, she said that it was possible to get the 'huge loan' from her neighbour as she had a regular income during that time and also had grown a social network during the four years working in the RMP. Her elder brother had also given her a 5,000 taka loan, which she had used to purchase a cow for selling milk. In the following year, her monthly income from milk selling had reached 1500 taka, up from 600 taka a month. In addition, she has established a corner shop on her homestead land to make the best use of her husband's potential. She has concentrated on saving and profit maximising. For instance, she had given less priority to paddy cultivation because the accessory costs of cultivation, such as irrigation, fertilizer and day labourers' wages, had increased to the point of reducing profits.

Table 4.1: Jahanara's IGA at a Glance (Local currency 'Taka')

Name of IGA	Initial Status (5th Year)		Present Status (7th Year)	
	Investment	Monthly Income	Investment	Monthly Income
Cow for Milk	5,000/=	600/=	20,000/=	2,000/=
Goat Fattening	0/=	0/=	1200/=	-
Corner Shop	0/=	0/=	5000/=	550/=
Banana Cultivation	0/=	0/=	2000/=	2500/=
Vegetable Cultivation	0/=	0/=	2000/=	1500/=
Handicrafts	0/=	0/=	0/=	500/=
Physical Asset Status	5,000/=		150,000/=	

In next two years she purchased 18 Decimals more of cultivable land, costing 9000 taka, which at the time of the interview was being used for banana and vegetable cultivation, a 5 decimal pond for 2500 taka. Her operating IGAs are given in table 4.1.

Her shop was losing customers due to the lack of a grain grinding machine but she could not install a machine because her husband would not be able to operate it due to his disability. Therefore, she started a business of goat fattening and duck raising as a coping strategy. Now she has her own house, 10 decimals of homestead land, a 5 decimal pond and 18 decimals of cultivable land worth more than 120,000 taka, a couple of successful IGAs like milk production, goat fattening, a shop, a banana garden, crop and vegetable cultivation and fishing in her own pond, and is earning more than 5000 taka per month. She has a very good affiliation with local elected bodies, NGOs, market retailers and wholesalers, government agricultural extension agencies and so on, involved in small group cooperatives and enjoying substantial support when needed.

She is producing sufficient protein for her family from the fish cultivated in her own pond and milk from her cow. She is independent-minded enough to refuse to give a dowry in her eldest daughter's marriage.[23] Also her other two daughters are in school, in classes IX and V, and her son is in class IV. Her daughters are also earning from stitching and handicrafts in their spare time. She has a very good understanding with her husband.

Sajeda Khatun: A Failed Case

Sajeda, abandoned by her husband when she was pregnant, was fully dependent on wages from household work before joining the RMP. Her neighbours informed me that she had again got married after being released from the RMP and that her husband had left her after only seven days. They assume that he might have taken Sajeda's withdrawal amount, which is provided from the mandatory savings to initiate an IGA or IGAs. They also claimed that Sajeda is not serious about her business and that she has consumed all of her earnings from the RMP, instead of making any further investment. Now she is staying with her only daughter on a local dam (a public resource) in her sister's poorly constructed house and living from hand to mouth.

[23] While working in the RMP, as a Technical Officer-Monitoring of a field office, I had to submit a household livelihood security survey report in each quarter of a year where, in a section, I evaluated the perception and practice of the respondents on the subject of dowry. On the evidence of my survey, it would be very surprising if anyone refused to give dowry for a daughter's marriage. I cross-checked the information provided by Jahanara with her neighbours and the elected member of that ward and found that the information was true.

After being released from the RMP Sajeda used to ferry dried fish and earn wages by working in agricultural lands, especially in chilli fields. When she was asked to provide the breakdown of her withdrawal amount she replied, 'some I had consumed, some were stolen and rest I used to pay off debts'. She said that she had invested only 500 taka for the IGA of dried fish. However, she sold the goods on credit and then failed to retrieve her money. It should be mentioned that from her fifth year business follow-up report, conducted by the RMP, I observed that she was lending money to others which she denied during the interview.

Though she seems to be approximately 35-40 years old, she is getting Aged Allowance under special consideration of the Char Bani Pakuria Union Parishad Chairman. In addition, she was surviving on begging from door to door during the interview and failed to describe future plans to move on from that situation. While talking with Sajeda's next-door neighbour as a key informant of Sajeda, she said, "she was very idle and was always rude to her neighbours and relatives, which altogether pushed her down".

Conceptual Issues

The above two case studies hint at the importance of social structures like kinship, networking with professional groups, community groups, and so on. None of the respondents had any affiliation with formal institutions at their pro-poor stage. Jahanara has taken advantage of informal institutions to ameliorate her livelihood, eventually, obtaining access to formal institutions; she is thus an example of what Blair (2005) defines as 'gainers', with links in the patron-client system as they use their patrons to protect their positions and to sustain them in their development concerns (i.e. economic growth, education, health, dowry, gender issues, transportation and so on). On the other hand, Sajeda remains in the group of 'submergees' who depend on their patrons and/or formal structures for their security concerns like, food, shelter, clothing, environmental disaster, extortion, violence and so on. The following paragraphs will explicate the informal institutions that exist in rural Bangladesh.

Kinship is one of the fundamental building blocks in a wider social order and is primarily expressed through patrilineage ('ghusti' in local term). The 'ghusti' often has some physical expression in a residential neighbourhood, called 'para', where composite dwellings are usually inhabited by people from the same family tree. To extend this

kinship, both Muslims and Hindus prefer to avoid marriage within their own 'ghusti' or 'para', and they try to be strict respectively in social status and caste, which eventually promises stronger social capital and/or networks to them (Bode, 2002). Thus, big farm households are likely to retain an elongated joint structure; in contrast, poorer households are likely to have a segregated nuclear structure. The headmen of big farm households usually exercise power within the household and its threshold, which altogether makes a 'samaj'.[24] Islam (2002) identifies the changing pattern of community leadership at grassroots level as follows:

- In pre-colonial Bangladesh there were three categories of local leaders: a) 'zamindar' and/or his associates, b) religious leaders ('Imam' for the Muslims and 'Purohit' or caste leaders for the Hindus), and c) lineage elders.
- In the colonial period, until the establishment of the Union Boards in 1970, the 'zamindars' enjoyed greater decision-making powers in all matters other than religion.
- The *Chawkidari Panchayet Act* of 1870, for the first time, led to the emergence of the dichotomy between formal and informal institutions in rural society. However, the formal leadership was backed by the rulers and 'samaj' remained as a strong launch pad for accessing formal authority.
- The change in national power in 1947 witnessed no major change in rural power structures in the 1950s, thus, local leadership was vested in the rich families.
- The 'Comilla Model', later renamed the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), united the small farmers together, first in Comilla and gradually defusing all over Bangladesh, under cooperatives since the 1960s. Such effort brought a new type of leadership, which consisted of cooperative managers, model farmers, tractor drivers and so on.
- As the Awami League was basically an urban-based political party, there were no significant changes in rural leadership in initial years after the independence. Usually, the new central power, after 1975, felt the urgency of building a powerbase at the rural level, which created substantial opportunities in rural

[24] Here 'threshold' means the neighbouring households which directly and/or indirectly depends on the big farm household and obey its decision.

leadership. Accordingly, there was some room for leadership from the middle and lower class farmers.

- Factional leadership emerged from the increasing number of local leaders.
- The increase of NGO activities, especially the micro credit, reduced the dependence of marginal people on their patrons and united them together.
- Since the beginning of military regimes, the political parties were duelling with each other to establish themselves in villages, and this led to the emergence of party leadership. Local party leaders have assumed and practised significant power in last few years, especially by establishing the Gram Sarkar, which once again give birth of the dichotomy between formal and informal institutions.

The above points reveal the origins of factionalism and explain the change in leadership through the years. The factionalism in leadership eventually divided the old 'samaj' into several parts. Islam (2002) suggests that ten Muslim 'samaj' in 1947 divided into 17 in 1975-76 and further separated into 34 in 1985. However, the major roles of 'samaj' are local justice and conflict resolution through 'shalish', which is a rural version of the judicial system represented by a panel to adjudicate over disputes. 'Shalish' was first accommodated at the UP level judiciary system in 1961 by the 'Shalish Court Ordinance', then replaced by the 'Village Court Ordinance'[25] in 1976. According to the act, UP chairmen preside over the 'shalish', which legally brought the elected body into power instead of wealth. However, the act has never been implemented successfully, which results in a long queue of formal court cases (Chondo, 2006). Again, the wave of politicising the local government institutions has eventually weakened the reputation of the 'shalish'. A revision and modernisation of this informal judiciary system is essential. The elimination of political influence and the exploitation of power will help marginal people and women to change socio-political reality.

[25] Once a case is filed in the village court, the chairman calls the 'shalish' and asks both group/persons to attend. In addition, s/he asks both of them to appoint two jurors, and one elected member of that UP, making a jury of five members. If the UP Chairman refuses to chair the court or if any confusion arises over her/his neutrality, the UNO will appoint another elected member of that UP to conduct the 'shalish'. If the verdict is a 4:1 vote majority there will be no chance to appeal, but at 3:2 an appeal can be placed in the formal lower court within 30 days of the verdict (Chaodo, 2006).

There is also a less formal arrangement of informal institutions. As an example, Islam (2002) quotes the empirical study of Hossain and Westergaard (1998) in Boringram of Bogra district. Here the villagers wanted to have a person from their village elected. There were three candidates willing to compete in the local election but none of them was likely to be elected as the voters (villagers) were split. Eventually, the 'samaj' leaders sat together, selected one person from them and other two candidates were paid their expenses and everybody agreed to the decision.

This is a very traditional example of informal local governance in Bangladesh. Another example of informal local governance on a larger scale is the Terrorist Extortionist Resistance Action Committee (TERAC) of Natore district, popularly known as the Stick-Whistle Committee[26] (*Lathi-Banshi Samity*). The TERAC is the best known informal civil society movement in Bangladesh and it experienced huge print media coverage in 2003. Initially the TERAC was a group of a hundred small entrepreneurs who were forced to pay protection money to local musclemen who were backed by the political leaders. Within two months of the registration, anti-drug activity was added to their aims. Within a few months, the TERAC become very popular among the community, increasing its membership to several thousands. Gradually, the TERAC has raised its voice on social justice, citizen demands and so on. Its success was recognised and in many other parts of Bangladesh it became a model of good governance. One significant feature of the TERAC is its fundraising, and they managed to obtain substantial currency support from the overseas Bangladeshi community.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion has introduced the formal and informal legal institutions of Rural Bangladesh. Building upon previous chapters, we can say: a) no regime has yet had a thoughtful local administrative hierarchy, despite a few changes; b) local government institutions were always being politicised, which has prevented successive regimes from

[26] The name, Stick-Whistle Committee, is because of their use of whistle and stick to protect themselves from any illegal payments to the musclemen. The committee planned to blow a whistle upon the entrance of any musclemen into their shops so that a crowd would gather a drive the musclemen away. The organization imposes a 5000 taka on any member who sits tight after hearing the whistle. The committee registered their name as TERAC on 16 November 2000.

devolving power to the local level; c) the decentralisation efforts in Bangladesh are more characterised by donor enthusiasm, indicating the influence of global neoliberal governance; d) the overall local government system does not follow any particular model. For example, the UP is 'functional' and the other two upper hierarchies are for 'areal' governance. Again, considering the existing structure of the UP, the UP Secretary is not accountable to the elected bodies, but rather to her/her upper bureaucratic hierarchy, which is partially similar to the 'dual supervision' of the French Model. In reverse, as the UP depends on the funds from the Upazila, the elected UP Chairmen remains loyal to the bureaucratic authority of the Upazila, which is conceptually similar to the 'subordination' of the Russian Model. e) However, though the elites (at the centre) still control resources at national and local levels and opportunities distributed by the state, land is no longer the principle basis of power and status. Rahman (2002) claims that nowadays agriculture contributes less than 50 percent of household income; f) there is substantial change in the traditional informal structures because of structural change at the centre; g) informal institutions have never been promoted politically; h) informal institutions have much potential as a powerful instrument for local justice.

Chapter Five

Capacity Assessment of Local Government in Rural Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Though a substantial number of scholars consider the global flow of decentralisation as a product of neoliberalism, it is unanimously accepted that 'true' decentralisation is one of the prerequisites of democratisation. Here 'democratisation' emphasises resource mobilisation and empowerment at the local level. In a country like Bangladesh, the marginalised people first learn about 'mobilisation and empowerment' from the NGOs because of weak local structures. Many efforts have been made in restructuring the local government in Bangladesh through the years since liberation. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB), with assistance of some NGOs, is now trying to capacitise local government institutions. The Rural Maintenance Programme (RMP) of CARE Bangladesh is one of the projects that have brought community, social elites and the Union Parishad (UP) together with its upper hierarchies. In this chapter I do not focus on the change of capacity levels of local government as an intervention of RMP; rather I will try to portray my observations as a former employee of this programme. Therefore, this research is not aimed at a comparative analysis of the local government before and after the intervention of CARE. Instead, the research extracts the facts to develop an understanding of the competence of rural local government institutions to operate the development programmes.

Before discussing the field note findings, it is important to introduce the RMP. Therefore, the first section of this chapter discusses the RMP, its successive developments, components and so on. The following section focuses on the information from different strata who are directly or indirectly involved with the RMP operation.

RURAL MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

Poverty is a process of accelerating deprivation, destitution, vulnerability and disempowerment. It is worthwhile mentioning that women are unevenly affected in those aspects of poverty. The RMP has been framed by addressing these issues. The RMP has been one of the largest and most successful development programmes of CARE International, funded by the European Union and CIDA and implemented by the GoB's Local Government Division (LGD) under the guidance of CARE Bangladesh. The programme was designed to employ destitute women to maintain rural roads and provide them with extensive training in new skills for life changing activities. It has contributed to

the betterment of life for a fraction of the most disadvantaged and marginalized rural women in the country, improving self-reliance through employment creation and livelihood development. The RMP was being implemented in 4,200 unions under 61 out of 64 districts (except in 3 Chittagong Hill Tracts districts) where 42,000 destitute women (the majority of whom were divorced, separated, widowed or outcast) were employed for 4 year cycles to maintain roughly 84,000 kilometres of rural earthen road year-round. Each year approximately 10,000 women graduated from the programme and the same numbers were replaced.

This programme had arranged year-round income-generating activities and helped to increase income of the poorest of the poor through partnering local government institutions (LGIs include UPs and the Upazila Parishads). Since inception, the programme had been working closely with the UPs and the Upazila Parishads. The key stakeholders of this programme were the destitute women at community level, LGI's officials and the UP representatives and concerned officials of LGIs.

The expected impacts of the RMP Project were as follows:

a. The livelihood security of rural poor, especially the destitute women would improve,

b. Rural roads would sustain the transfer of goods and services to markets and link to rural institutions, and

c. Rural women would be recognized as agents of development.

The purpose of this Project was to improve the socio-economic status and food security of RMP women in a sustainable manner, and to maintain year-round traffic flow on important designated roads. The expected outcomes of the project include the following:

a. RMP women are economically self-reliant,

b. Status of RMP women and their self-confidence, social recognition and opportunities are improved at household and community levels,

c. The health and nutritional status of RMP women and their household members is improved,

d. Year-round use of maintained rural roads by light traffic is improved, and

e. Local government institutions effectively manage road maintenance independently.

The overall expected outputs of the RMP Project included the development of human capital and community assets, accumulation of financial capital, and improvement of institutional capacity.

Different Phases of RMP

RMP Phases I, II and III

Between 1983 and 2001, three phases have been funded through LGIs/ Union Parishads by the Government of Bangladesh from general revenue, by local government Union Parishads, and by successive multilateral Food Aid grants from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). CARE initiated the RMP in 1983 as a cash-for-work road maintenance project within a food security framework in 7 Unions under 7 Districts.

In 1992, the project was redesigned as a food security and sustainable development project, extending the continuum from food relief to sustainable poverty alleviation, including promoting the economic and human security of destitute women. The project added an "income diversification component" (IDC). The IDC has added some skills training to the RMA women so that they can earn equal or more than their RMP wage after graduation from the RMP.

Figure 5.1: RMA women are operating Income Generating Activities (IGAs) for their economic amelioration (Photo: RMP/CARE).

In 1998, after the amendment of government legislation, the RMP started capacity strengthening of local government institutions to hand over its road maintenance part to the Union Parishads. The project thereafter was expanded in Phases II (1989-1995) and III-stages 1 and 2 (1995-2001) to cover road maintenance activities and the employment of destitute women in Bangladesh.

RMP III – Stage 3

The new stage in RMP Phase III, hereafter referred to as RMP III-3, has been jointly funded by the Government of Bangladesh, the Government of Canada, and the European Community. This phase began in 2002 for three years. Under this phase, the RMP has provided wage income for approximately 42,000 destitute women who maintain up to 84,000 kilometres of important rural earthen roads.

Because of the global flow of decentralisation, the donor organisations have stressed the use of local resources to regulate the RMP. Accordingly, the new focus of the programme has been to involve and strengthen the capacity of LGIs in all daily project management and monitoring activities so that they can take over the programme operation fully-fledged. In this regard, the 4,200 participating UPs are considered to be frontline grassroots partner and beneficiary organizations in the project's local roadwork maintenance planning and implementation activities. Finally, the programme has been handed over to the LGD and MLGRD&C and they have been executing the RMP since July 2006.

Different Components of RMP

It has already been mentioned that at different times the RMP has changed its programme strategy and, thus, amended its components. The programme was initiated with the rural earthen road maintenance, added income generating activities in the early 90s and capacity strengthening of local government since 2002. Finally, the RMP has consisted of three components:

1. Road Maintenance Component (RMC).
2. Income Diversification Component (IDC).
3. Capacity Strengthening Component (CS).

Road Maintenance Component (RMC)

This component covers technical aspects of road maintenance management. It deals with the recruitment of road maintenance workers, commonly known as Road Maintenance Association (RMA). The UPs manage this component with support from the Upazilas under the auspices of the LGD under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MLGRD&C).

The RMA Women were being paid Tk. 54 (42 pence[27]) daily (as of May, 2006) for their work, of which Tk. 14 (11 pence) were being transferred to mandatory savings accounts. Wages were being paid straight to the Road Maintenance Crew accounts that were kept with local banks and each woman also has her own bank account for deposits of mandatory savings. The crew wage payment and banking system was leak-proof. RMP women employed for roadwork were selected by the Project Management Committees (PMC) with support from the UPs: only 10 women were selected per Union. Since numbers of eligible destitute women far exceed project limits, final selection was done through an impartial lottery draw. On the basis of a set of criteria and strategy, the UP recruited 10 women in each union through a lottery for the RMP.

Figure 5.2: The RMA women are maintaining the rural earthen roads to keep it passable year-round (Photo: RMP/CARE)

[27] In this research the currency is converted by considering UK £1 = Taka 130

Selection Criteria of RMP women (Source: RMP/CARE)

- Permanent resident of concerned Union.
- Widowed, divorced, separated/abandoned or married.
- Priority to widowed, divorced or separated/abandoned first.
- Age between 18 and 35 years.
- Priority to most disadvantaged and dependents (Dependents = children, mentally or physically handicapped husband and dependent parents).
- Candidate must be mentally sound and physically capable of performing road maintenance work.
- Former RMP crewmembers who have worked less than one year in the RMP and met the above criteria will automatically be selected. Other than that, no former RMA member(s) can be selected.

Recruited RMP women received training from Project Management Committees on road maintenance techniques in order that rehabilitated roads meet required standards.

Following technical training on road maintenance methods, RMP women are organized into 10-person work crews, named "Road Maintenance Associations" (RMAs), with one RMA per Union. Each RMA is then assigned responsibility for maintaining approximately 20 km of earthen rural roads.

The management and monitoring of road maintenance activities are primarily carried out through Project Management Committees (PMCs) in each union. The role of CARE is to observe and monitor the quality of training given to the 1st year and 2nd year women as well as monitor the project-integrity.

Income Diversification Component (IDC)

Women's life skills training and counselling have been provided with a strong focus on developing self-reliant business skills for managing sustainable income generating activities, enhancing understanding and ability in establishing women's rights, health, reproductive health and money counting.

As part of the women's wages, known as mandatory saving, a sum has been saved and deposited in their individual bank account for use as start-up capital for self-managed

income generation activities. Each RMA has received a sequenced 4-year training programme on various issues and topics. Each woman has been assisted with selecting a viable business interest, which generates adequate financial returns on her labour, and savings and investments. Once each RMA member has been engaged in her chosen income generating activities in the fourth year, she is given regular counselling and advice. Women have been given both group and individual counselling in order to critically review and share their business progress, thereby learning from each other about problems or constraints encountered and gaining suggestions from peers about possible ways of solving such problems.

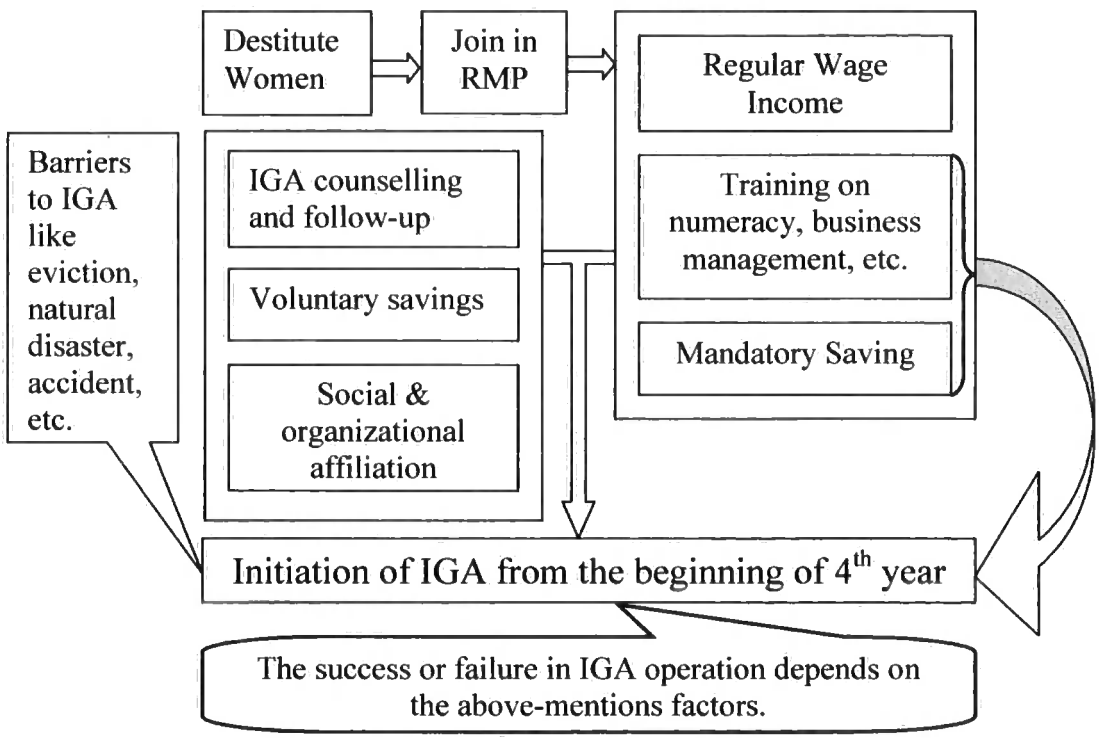


Figure 5.3: The Framework of IGA Operation by the RMA Women

One of the major responsibilities of RMP-IDC was to monitor the performance of participating UPs in regard to recruitment of RMA women, supervision, management and reporting of the road maintenance part, and problem solving of the RMA. RMP-IDC has made periodic visits to UPs to assess their performance and provide necessary guidance for improvement.

Capacity Strengthening Component (CS)

The project has covered the institutional strengthening of LGIs with an emphasis on planning, management, implementation and monitoring in the road maintenance part of the RMP. Membership in LGIs has continually shifted because of local level elections; whereas continuity of direct local community representation is necessary to make the RMP more responsive to the decision-making influence of local residents. Therefore, for the purposes of managing the RMP at the local level, each Union Parishad establishes a "Project Management Committee" (PMC). Each PMC consists of a female UP member as the PMC Chairperson, the UP Secretary as the Member Secretary and three elected members from local communities (at least one of whom must be a woman) as General Members.

The activities performed by PMC are:

- recruitment of RMP crew members,
- formation of RMA,
- imparting training to RMA on quality road maintenance techniques,
- identification and selection of the 20 kilometres of earthen road to maintain,
- developing quarterly work plans for RMA activities based on the priority of road repairs,
- follow-up monitoring, appraisal and scoring of road repair works completed by the RMA,
- depositing 10% of RMA wages in to the RMA crewmembers bank accounts each year,
- ensuring that the RMA receive their wages every 14 days,
- keeping a record of all work plans and road maintenance activities on file for review,
- consolidated reporting on a quarterly basis, and
- reporting on project progress to the Upazila Parishad.

The specific objectives of the capacity strengthening component of the RMP were to strengthen the management capacity of local government to manage the development activities (including the RMP), to enhance participation of female representatives in the

LGI planning and decision-making process, and to encourage the participation of the community members in development activities.

CARE has been providing a comprehensive training package on the project management cycle and project management skills to each UP and its affiliated PMC. The Capacity Strengthening component included important training issues such as local governance and conflict resolution. CS training has four separate modules ranging from one day to three day sessions.

The training covers issues such as the importance and scope of community and women's participation in development, community and local resource mobilization and techniques of project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation with community participation and feedback. The RMP has encouraged women's leadership roles in the different project committees at the local level and in support of this objective has undertaken special additional training programmes designed to support and enhance the leadership and management capabilities of elected women members of the Union Parishad and Project Management Committees.

Following this training, the UPs and their associated PMCs have become responsible for undertaking specific RMP management and monitoring activities. The summary purpose of involving UPs was to create a strong element of local responsibility for RMP investments in road maintenance, with a special view of using road maintenance public works as a longer-term "social safety nets" programme for sustainable improvement of food, livelihood security and the social status of destitute women.

Capacity Strengthening Training Courses and their Contents for the LGIs are as follows:

1 day Orientation on Development and Local Government (Participants: the Chairman, the Secretary and all elected members of the UP)

- Structure of Local Government Institutions
- Governance and the role of LGIs in establishing good governance
- The role and function of UP
- Women in development
- The role of community in development

– Conflict resolution

3 days Training on Road maintenance Management Training (Participants: All PMC members)

– Improving project committee management
– RMP and its components
– Role and responsibilities of UP, PMC and RMA
– Steps of planning and implementing RMC activities
– RMA selection policy and procedures
– Road maintenance criteria the techniques of RMA tasks
– Assignment and work supervision and monitoring
– Technique of RMA training
– Project problems identification and solving
– Monitoring and reporting systems

2 days Training on Development Project Management (Participants: the Chairman, the Secretary, all female members and three selected male members of the UP)

– Concept of participatory development
– Role of women in development
– Description of RMP components
– Project management
– Planning, Budgeting, Local resources mobilization and its linkage with RMC management
– Organising and establishing of RMC management
– Project implementation and its linkage with RMC implementing activities
– Establishment of RMC monitoring and reporting systems

1 day Roadwork Maintenance Management Refresher Training (Participants: All PMC members)

– Sharing of experience on RMC operation and identifying the areas that need to be improved
– Training to identify weak areas

- Discuss the roles and responsibilities of different parties

1 day Experience sharing session (Participants: All female members and female Chairman of UP)

- Review of previous action plan and share experience on success, failures and problems faced in achieving the action plan;
- Discussion of ways to overcome failures and problems identified;
- Techniques of enhancing communication and coordination with each other and with supporting organization at the local level.

2 days Training on Leadership and Development (Participants: All female members and female Chairman of UP)

- History and the need for female members in Local Government;
- Barriers faced by the elected members and ways to overcome barriers;
- Leadership skills (meeting conduction, presentation, communication, networking and organisation of women. Problem-solving and decision-making.

In the present study, the performance of Local Government Institutions (UP, PMC and Upazila Cell) is assessed in terms of planning, management, implementation, monitoring and supervision, leadership capabilities and women's participation in decision-making. In addition, empowerment status of women is assessed through measuring control over work-planning, mobility, and participation in decision-making, knowledge and information. This study also covers the issue of empowerment of LGIs including their self-confidence, opportunities and capabilities.

EXPERIENCES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Project Implementation:

The process of RMP implementation starts when a Union fulfils the requirement of 20 km of earthen roads and a minimum number of participating destitute women chosen by lottery. The recruitment is advertised by the UP so that everybody can participate and ten women are selected from each intervention Union.

There are issues with the system of operation. First, according to the opinion of CARE staff, many Unions would not be eligible if the aforementioned criteria were followed strictly.[28] However, all the respondents unanimously agree that the drawing of lots is unbiased and transparent in the recruitment system. There are allegations of negligence in announcements before recruitment, together with some external persuasion from different levels of local government and political leaders, which may threaten the system after the withdrawal of CARE. Several participants argued that, as the UP Chairmen are public figures, they face problems unless at least one woman from each ward is recruited by the lottery system. CARE staff told me that they had a couple of examples of bribery in the UPs and PMCs, resulting in inadequate announcements, the hiding of ages, etc., in order to favour their own candidates during recruitment. Interestingly, I was offered a bribe during a visit in an implementation programme so that I would overlook nepotism while selecting the women. However, a few respondents from UP and Upazila also added their concern about the fairness of selection in the absence of CARE.

These realities of patron-clientism are well described by Blair (2005) and Bode (2002). Blair (2005) tries to identify the pattern of relationship between different poor groups and the local power holders. He categorises four groups of poor and defines different types of relationships with their 'patrons'. He notices that the poor have two major concerns: for security (Destitution, Disaster, Crime and the State) and for development (Agriculture, Human Capital, Family and Infrastructure). In reality, he observes, the 'poor' (43 percent of his sample) rely on their 'patrons' for their survival and development. Bode (2002) points out the role of 'gushti'[29] in the patron-client system. Involvement with a large 'gushti' secures mandates for future elections. During the meeting with CARE employees, a respondent informed me that once she received a recommendation from a central government minister to recruit an RMA member to the project. Many of the Field Trainers said that receiving requests from the Upazila level was not at all surprising. These denote some social networks and identity of 'gushti' of some candidates for a job

[28] This statement, in general, gives a hint of programme accomplishments without the maintenance of quality. But as this is not directly linked with the main objective of this paper, this issue is not discussed further.

[29] 'Patrilineage' means kinship in extended family based on the male line.

in the RMP. The elected local leader in the UP tried to pursue material gain for these people for his own re-election.

Of course, this all confirms that the UP is not carrying out its due responsibilities for the RMP, which might be because of either lags in their general loyalty or because they have no personal benefit from the RMP. The enormous corruption in 'food for work' projects is well known in the NGO sector in Bangladesh, which might be a factor. At that time, the UP was much interested to implement the RMP in their Union because they could gain a significant share of the food (wheat) by depriving the destitute women. 'Unfortunately', instead of gaining that share, they are now contributing ten percent of the total wage of those women from their annual revenue. Now, they have only one thing to gain from this project which is 'popularity' and, therefore, they try to exploit the recruitment process. During the FGD with them is different regions, a very common suggestion was to select one woman from each Ward (subsection of a Union) so that they can maintain their 'popularity' in every corner of their jurisdiction.

Trainings for RMAs

In the early stage of the RMP, the women were only involved with road work. Later it was realised that some human resource training could make them more self-reliant, instead of depending on the wage only. Therefore, they were being given different training like health and safety, basic numeracy, basic literacy, rights and gender, business management and so on. This training, on the one hand, is useful for developing awareness of safety nets and, on the other hand, to make them economically empowered. Accordingly, the UP and Upazila Cell were trained on those issues ready to take over the programme after CARE's withdrawal. Another motive of this intervention was to recruit new RMA members after a four year cycle, with an objective to cover the maximum number of destitute women. The following section summarises the findings in this regard.

First Year Training

During an experience-sharing workshop with CARE employees, it emerged that PMC members are not attending the technical training sessions because only the UP Secretary is able to conduct the technical training session. The issue of the UP Secretary will be described later.

Second Year Training:

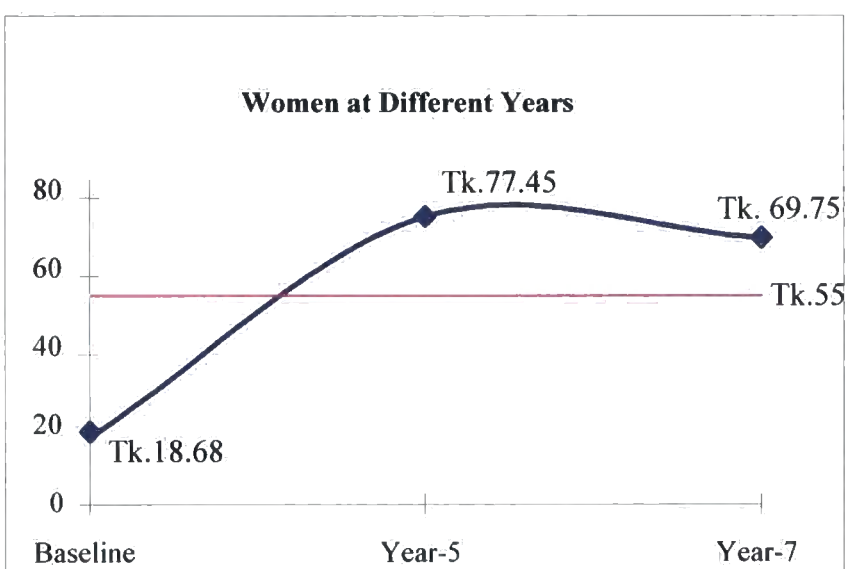
In the second year the RMA members used to receive legal rights and gender training along with basic numeracy. It was very common that many husbands would return to their abandoned or separated or divorced wives because they had started receiving regular earnings from the RMP. In a substantial number of cases, these reunions were fake and only for the money. The awareness from this second year training helped many RMA members not to be cheated, or to take legal measures once they are cheated. Obviously, it is very important that the trainers must be competent in conveying such important and sensitive messages and for training in the final two years as well. The answers to the question of whether they are competent can be obtained from the following section, where the capacity of the UP and PMC will be evaluated.

Third Year Training

This training helps participants to be aware about health and nutritious food. In addition, a good number of RMAs initiate Income Generating Activities (IGA) just after receiving the elementary Business Management training.

Fourth Year Training

The fourth year is mainly focused on business management training as the RMA members are prepared to be phased out after this year and new members are recruited. The RMA



Graph 5.1: Average Daily Income of RMA Women (Source: RMP/CARE)

member needs potential monitoring in this year as they are a marginalised group. Blair's (2005) study identifies 12 percent pro-poor and 31 percent moderately poor in his sample. However, when it is the group of women the proportion of poor will be much higher in a typically underdeveloped, patriarchical society like Bangladesh. It has already been mentioned that the RMP has been recruiting women for a four year cycle. Graph 5.1 and table 5.1 represent the women's group at the baseline – before joining the RMP to year 5 – one year after graduation from the RMP and year 7 – three years after graduation.

Table 5.1: Land Ownership of RMP Women (Source: RMP/CARE)

Land Holding Group	Baseline (%)	Year-5 (%)	Year-7 (%)
Nil (Landless)	69.1	32.1	3.2
1-5 Decimal (Absolutely Landless)	15.9	24.8	22.0
5-50 Decimal (Functionally Landless)	14.4	37.7	58.7
50-150 Decimal (Marginal Owner)	.6	5.4	13.3
>150 Decimal (Small Owner)	0	0	2.8

Though the tendency of operating IGA gradually declines after the 5th year, conversely the ownership of land increases after the 5th year. The Household Livelihood Security (HLS) survey shows a feeling of 'vulnerability', as discussed before, and the RMA members concentrate on increasing their land holding. If the UP could be strong and loyal enough to support marginal women, they would concentrate on IGAs and so help to fight poverty.

Facts of Inactive PMC in RMP Operation

Before discussing the operational activities of the project, it is important to discuss the facts of inactive or less active PMCs. Each PMC is headed by a female member of the UP, organized by the UP secretary and three volunteers from the community who are respected by all. The PMC was assumed to be the stimulator of roadwork. However, there are many allegations against PMCs that they are not performing satisfactorily in RMP operations. This was discussed with different UP, PMC, RMA and field staff and their opinions are summarized below.

- Because the PMC do not benefit they are less interested in working for the RMP. Some PMC members have personal commitments, like business, and they never give time

for the RMP, as it adds no direct value in their life. For the same reason, the UP cannot punish them for their non-cooperation in RMP activity.

- It is also observed that coordination between the UP and the PMC is not working in many unions. In such cases, the UP Chairman takes no notice of the PMC's recommendations. PMC members are not empowered enough to argue with the UP Chairman about the RMP.
- There are no set criteria for selecting the PMC. A noticeable number of PMC members were barely educated and some were illiterate. The UP chairman thinks that the PMC might be of benefit financially and, therefore, tries to select his favourites for the PMC without bothering with the criteria. Thus, newly elected Chairmen are changing the PMCs. Then again, new PMCs fail to operate the RMP properly as they do not have any training.
- UPs are not encouraging PMCs to participate in meetings of the RMP. Thus, the PMC is becoming separated from RMP activity.
- Newly elected UP chairmen, often, try to change the PMC and assign his/her obedient persons. Such an attitude again reminds us about the patron-clientalism, discussed earlier.
- Because less qualified persons are selected to be members of the PMC, they perform very poorly. Filing, for instance, depends on the UP secretary but usually s/he is extremely busy with other development projects and certification like marriages, births, trade licences, etc, and fails to visit the RMA workplaces. Visits are left to the PMC members and they inform the secretary, who then prepares the report. This is unsatisfactory because the PMC members are ignorant about the information required for roadwork monitoring.
- Another important observation was the apparent segregation of the UP members from the UP affairs because of proactive Gram Sarkar members. The evolution of the Gram Sarkar is discussed earlier in this thesis. However, it is essential to note here that, despite of the negative decision from the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, the Gram Sarkar was introduced and encouraged by different efforts of the BNP-led government in the last few years.
- The RMP monitoring format is too lengthy and the UP/PMC is not interested in going through the details. Therefore, the information on the monitoring formats is not adding any value to effective RMP operation.

- Many changes have taken place in formats in the last year and the PMC members were not informed of those changes.

PMC Chairmen were found to be inactive in RMP operation. In fact, being female, society expects PMC Chairmen to give most time and effort to her own family. Thus, they are also discouraged from visiting distant workplaces of the RMAs.

Road work Performance (RMA, PMC and UP)

Road List: It is expected that while preparing the list of important rural earthen roads for the RMP, the community will participate in road selection. In Austadhar[30] Union, for instance, the RMP road list was prepared according to the need of common people as stated by the UP bodies. But, none of the respondents gave any information that refers to involvement by ordinary people in the road list preparation process. More importantly, the community does not even know that it is supposed to be involved. The respondents said that more priority was given to the linking roads with schools, bazaars, and such important places and, finally, this was approved by the UNO.

Quarterly Roadwork Plan: After preparing the road list, UP bodies and community leaders are supposed to develop a quarterly roadwork plan considering all the natural and human events like flood, rain, important nodes, light vehicle flow pattern, etc. In reality, the entire project files of the UP are maintained by the UP secretary and, usually, he prepares the quarterly roadwork plan on his own. It is very unfortunate that if the secretary remains absent, generally, no-one can provide adequate information on the ongoing development projects. Again, they prepare the quarterly roadwork plan as part of the programme and then forget to follow that plan. Respondents said that sometimes they can not follow that plan because of a sudden need of maintenance caused by a natural disruption. This implies that seasonal factors were not considered when preparing the quarterly roadwork plan.

Quarterly Review Session: In the RMP, a quarterly review session was introduced to identify the problems experienced with programme implementation from all of the

[30] In this chapter 'Austadhar' is used as a pseudonym of the cited unions for the sake of anonymity.

counterparts at the UP level. It was found that no quarterly review session was held in the studied UP after organising the community leaders as a PMC. The PMC Chairman (one selected female UP member) of Austadhar union said that she did not know that a review session should be held quarterly with the UP body, the PMC and RMA members. Again, though they sometimes discuss the problems of the RMP among themselves in other official meetings, they do not inform RMA members that they should join in those meetings. Thus, the key beneficiaries of the RMP are always excluded from sharing their learning and experience with the implementers.

Figure 5.4: The RMA members are signing the register book after attending a meeting at UP office (Photo: RMP/CARE).

Roadwork Assessment: The roadwork done by the crew members is supposed to be monitored by the UP bodies on a regular basis. The UP Chairman said that he visits to observe roadwork but he is not acquainted with the roadwork assessment system and, therefore, does not complete the register. Though respondents mentioned the names of other of UP/PMC members as active implementers of the RMP, in reality the UP secretary takes on all of the project-related responsibilities. For instance, the Chairman of Austadhar Union referred to Mr Mozemmel, a UP member, who always does the assessment. Mr Mozemmel claimed that he frequently visits to observe roadwork and that he has visited today. However, he failed to answer when he was asked to say where the RMP crew were working on that day. Again, while discussing this issue with the PMC Chairman separately, she said that Mr Mozemmel does not visit RMP workplaces frequently and that he always tries to be 'politically correct' in front of visitors. While

Box 5.1: Roadwork Assessment of Austadhar Union

In Austadhar Union, after discussion with the UP and community leaders, the RMP workplace was visited at round 11.30 AM, but there was no-one to be found. Then, Zobeda, one of crew members, was found at her residence. Zobeda said that a surrogate has been appointed as she needed to attend to her familial work. She failed to give the name of her replacement. She said that this group has the practise of informing their organizer (group leader) one day before if they need to a replacement, then the organizer appoints someone for that day. She further added that the UP secretary gives and receives roadwork assignments from them at the UP office without any physical verification. Then with Zobeda the RMP workplace was visited again but it was empty. According to Zobeda's information, Delu's House, where the RMAs keep their tools, was visited and was informed by the resident that RMA members had left with their tools at around 11.00 AM.

interviewing the Chairman and Mr. Mozemmel, their answers were confined to what 'should be done' instead explaining what they were currently practising. The RMP employees were advised by Headquarters to suggest that the UP should promote their sanitation and nutrition programme. Keeping that in mind, when the Chairman was asked about the level of sanitation programme in his Union, he stated that in one of his nine wards he has accomplished full sanitation and will try to cover the whole Union if he can obtain funds from other sanitation-related development programmes. However, while discussing this issue with another member of that UP, I discovered that the sanitised ward is his main constituency (Ward) of voters, where he lives.

Assessment of Financial Management Skills

It was assumed that all UPs would generate funds by mobilizing their own resources and be able to operate small-scale development programmes from their own funds. Usually, UP main fund-raising areas are trade and home taxes, which they fail to collect for political and administrative reasons. In rural areas people are very poor and are not familiar with the concept of taxation, so they refuse to pay. Chairmen are supposed to employ UP members to ensure that taxes are collected from all the probable sectors. But these UP Chairman and Members never force the community to pay the tax, assuming

that they might fail to get a mandate in next local government elections. Accordingly, they blame the UP Secretary as s/he is ultimately responsible for forcing the community to pay its taxes, but the Secretary has no power to force anyone without the written permission of UP Chairman. Thus, the taxation system in rural areas exists in legislation only and has no use in practise. However, the UP does manage the 10% contribution[31] from the 1% fund[32] of the Upazila. Therefore, they do not have to give any additional effort to prepare a budget for their 10% contribution, and accordingly, the contribution is deposited in time. However, they do not have any budget for the PMC as they feel they have a scarcity of resources.

Assessment of Supervision Skills

Supervision of PMC/UP Monitor: In Austadhar Union, the UP secretary is very irregular since joining eight months ago. He lives far away from the UP and rarely visits his office. The UP Chairman complained about him at the Upazila level, and the Upazila insisted that he show-cause. He was regular for a week and then again reverted back to previous non-engagement. This information about the UP Secretary was received from all of the respondents. However, in general, UP Chairmen do not supervise PMC/UP monitors.

Supervision of RMA Members: It is observed that PMC Chairmen, who are assumed to be the key person of the RMP in every UP, often fail to provide basic information on RMP activity planning, organization and financial management. Respondents in Austadhar Union complained that if they find any irregularities in the roadwork and ask crew women why, crew members reply that they are not working under their supervision but are rather working under CARE's supervision.

Assessment of Reporting Skills of the UP

As the UP secretary maintains the RMP files, no-one was able to comment on the preparation of a quarterly report, its timeliness, problem reports, and so on. However,

[31] The 10% fund is the contribution of the UP to RMP implementation.

[32] This is the fund which UP receives from upazila to implement the annual development plan.

respondents said that they can not maintain timeliness of reporting. There are some other findings on why only the UP Secretary is involved with the reporting:

- It is observed that many UP Chairman change the PMC by appointing their relatives or trusted persons after newly being elected, assuming that the PMC might obtain some amenities from the GoB or CARE. This type of PMC never works for the programme.
- There is no set rule that the PMC members have to be educated. It is frequently observed that they do not have formal education and, thus, they avoid the writing tasks of the programme.
- The PMC, from the very outset of the programme design, was assumed to be voluntary participation by the community. Therefore, there is no provision of financial benefit to the PMCs which, eventually, discourages them to participate adequately.

Financial Capacity and Development Activities of UP

Income Sources

Hat (local weekly or fortnightly markets or periodic bazaars) are well established growth centres in the surveyed unions, which are owned by the Upazila. The most common sources of income are:

- Certification fees
- Income from Union Tax (Chowkidary Tax)
- Income from Housing Tax
- Income from the issuing of trade licences
- Income from issuance of vehicle (Van, Rickshaw) licences
- Leasing *Khash* land, pond, etc.

The historical background (Chapter 2) and local government structure (Chapter 4) explains the shift of income sources between the UP and the Upazila. Different political regimes have changed their political focus for their own political gain, which has stimulated this shift. However, this study has found the leasing of *Khash* Land, Pond, *Hat*

and so on and development funds from the Upazila and donor organizations are the main sources of their income.

Development Activities of UP

At present, UPs have the oversight of many projects, including micro-credit and other development programmes of various NGOs, food for work, cash for work, VGD (Vulnerable Group Development), VGF (Vulnerable Group Feeding), sanitation and social forestry under the LGED and others. Normally the UP has limited personnel, and limited administrative capacity, and is unable to look after these activities properly. This seriously hampers effective implementation of development programmes. The UP has to maintain about a hundred registers, including those of the RMP without proper infrastructure. It is found in many cases that the UP has no power, in terms of finance and logistics, to run these programmes independently.

Participation of Women Representatives

No noticeable participation of women representatives (e.g. PMC Chairperson) was observed. While conducting the FGD with the UP and PMC it was observed that women were not participating willingly in the discussion. When asked publicly about their participation in the decision-making process of UP activities, they said that their opinions were always considered along with the views of their male colleagues. Interestingly, during the in-depth interviews, the women gave the reverse opinion to the same question. An invisible social barrier and lack of initiatives by male colleagues prevents the women representatives from participating in the preparation of the road list and quarterly roadwork plan, quarterly review session, roadwork assessment, budget preparation, and so on. In addition, the women representatives have numerous other social roles as mother, wife, housewife, and so on, which do not allow them to stay away from their family for a long time and hinders visits to many places in the community. This ultimately ties their participation to a very limited arena.

Governance Issues

When good governance is observed in RMA selection at all levels of participation, responsibility and accountability have been ensured. CARE has mainly taken the role of

monitoring in these cases. But in the case of activity planning or financial management and supervision, a lack of accountability is seen amongst the respondent unions, and in many cases the preparation of the road lists and roadwork plans, review sessions, and roadwork assessments are done by the UP Secretary. Inadequate participation of the PMC is identified in these areas, along with insufficient RMP budget preparation and supervision of RMAs. Furthermore, as mentioned in the financial capacity section, while preparing the budget, the UP is looking at several sources of income, which they often fail to collect, so no value is added to the budget preparation. Again, for the same reason, they fail to pay an honorarium to the PMC, though they include that payment in their budget preparations. This ultimately hampers the UP in supervising the PMC properly.

Overall observations regarding institutionalization of local government bodies

Local government institutions (the UP in this case) need to be strengthened and have to be developed with a strong sense of local responsibility among the popular leaders. They are the only body accountable to the people. Formation of the PMC is the first and most dynamic step introduced in the UP to institutionalise the process of planning, implementation and management of the RMP. The RMP conducted several external evaluations and these revealed that the RMP is an effective development intervention for the poverty reduction of women, as well as for the maintenance of rural infrastructure. For the sake of the development of rural Bangladesh, these local bodies should play a proactive role in effectively implementing development activity such as the RMP.

Upazila RMC Cell

Organization: The RMC Cell is formed by the below stated members:

a. UNO (UNO is chairman of the cell in the absence of the Upazila Chairman)
b. Upazila Engineer (Organising Secretary of the Cell)
c. Project Implementation Officer (PIO)
d. Social Welfare Officer
e. Women's Welfare Officer
f. 2 selected Chairmen
g. 1 selected Female UP Member

Roles and Responsibilities

The Upazila RMP Cell was formed to coordinate and manage road maintenance works in the unions. The specific functions of this cell are to monitor, review and take follow-up action based on reports. They are to generate project fund and performance reports. The cell members are supposed to visit the UP to assess their performance in roadwork related activities that include monitoring, PMC formation, RMA selection and training, road selection, task assignment, work quality monitoring and problem solving. The cell is to assist the participating UP to access and deposit its share and ensure timely transfer of crew wages to the Union Maintenance Crew Account as per guidelines and circulars from the LGD-RMP Cell. The Upazila RMC Cell formation was completed as per the GoB circular and executed by most Upazilas in April and June of 2004. Of the entire sample Upazilas, the RMP Cells only in planning and are yet to become functional.[33] For example, the PIOs of one Upazila did not know that they are members of the Cell because they are not informed, even by letter.

The cell members are often not aware of their roles. The above-mentioned circular on RMC Cell formation explains the roles of the cell in brief, but individual roles of the cell members are not laid out. The Cell members have not yet met together to discuss their roles as members. The Upazila RMP Cells might end up being worthless.

The findings of these interviews with Upazila officials show that the performance of most of the cells was poor, though some of the respondents, without giving any noticeable examples, felt that the functioning of the cell was fair. The respondents stated that their workload, a lack of guidance and monitoring from the LGD RMP Cell, lack specific roles and responsibilities and, above all, the unaccountability of cell members is the major constraint in improving the functionality of the cell. One UNO stated that the Upazila-LGED should take the initiative in making the cell function. He further suggested that as the Upazila Engineer remains highly engaged with different development activities, the Social Welfare Officer (SWO) or Women Affairs Officer (WAO) could be involved as the focal person of the cell. Another UNO referred to the GoB circular LGD/Moni-1/RMP-11/2000/59 issued on April 02, 2000 where it was mentioned that the Upazila

[33] The Upazila officials (UNO, Engineer and PIO) were interviewed from 05-15 January 2005. However, during the phase out workshops on April-June 2005 the findings were similar.

RMP Cell members should receive training for two days on RMP project management. He stated that the LGD is not providing adequate guidance to the cell.

Project Management

The cell is responsible for managing and coordinating the RMP at the union level, transferring crew wages to the union crew account, monitoring RMP activity on rural earthen roads, organising training for UPs and PMCs so that they can mange the RMP at union level, reviewing the UP contribution and project report quarterly and sending biannual project reports to the LGED-RMP cell. With reference to the GoB circular on RMC Cell formation, none of the sample Upazilas is providing adequate support to the UP/PMC. They provide support only if the UP/PMC ask for it.

One UNO reported that in most cases he provides support for problems in RMA selection and also, in a few cases, he follows-up on the problems. He also provides support in CS training, such as providing the venue, inaugurating the training sessions and sometimes even conducting sessions. He further reported that the chairman of one union under his Upazila asked for a 10% financial contribution from the RMP women. He warned all union chairmen about this matter in the Upazila coordination meeting, in order to pre-empt such problems. The figures presented in the following table will give some idea about the actual scenario of how the cell is functioning and to what extent.

Field Visits

Again, it has been reported that none of the interviewed RMP Cell members performed any field visits during the reporting period. A Project Implementation Officer said that it is not difficult to perform field visits to the RMP along with other field visits of different development activities, but as the Upazila Engineer is the Organising Secretary of the RMP Cell, the Upazila Engineer should take the necessary initiative in this regard. A negligible number of the respondents have conducted field visits on the way to their other tasks. They presented the following findings:

- The PMC is less accountable to the UP because their work is voluntary.
- A female member's decision is not always considered, as they are not empowered and the attitude of the Chairman has yet to change.

- Some RMA members' roadwork quality is poor and attendance erratic.
- The UP does not send project reports on time.

Action against Field Findings

The Cell feels that they have no authority to initiate action against the UPs. One of the respondents argued that the UP Chairman and members are elected bodies, and thus hold political power, which in most cases is more influential than that of the officials. Some respondents also said that if they recommend discontinuing the RMP in any UP, the ultimate sufferers will be the RMA members, not the Chairman or any other member of that UP. Therefore, in many cases, it was awkward for the UNO to take disciplinary measures against UPs that perform poorly.

RMP Fund Management

The respondents confirmed that they are sending the semi-annual Upazila and UP account reports regularly, though a noticeable portion are either not sending the report regularly or are not aware about the frequency. Some of the respondents felt the need of a strong monitoring system of the LGD to accelerate the performance of the Upazila in this regard. Sometimes, they face problems in forwarding UP account reports if the UP delays sending their reports to the concerned Upazila. While discussing with DTLs (District Team Leaders) of RMP on Upazila fund management capacity, they reported that though the Upazila sends the crew wage and account reports on time, there must be follow-up visits by CARE staff.

Function of Upazila RMC Cell

The interview was conducted with the UNO in most cases and in few cases with either Upazila Engineer or PIO. Though, according to the design of the RMP, the Upazila RMC Cell has a key role to play; but the response of the semi-structured questionnaire gives us the opportunity to think further. Out of 12 surveyed upazilas, eight respondents' opinion was poor and the other four were equally fair and good when they were asked about the function of the Upazila RMC Cell. They mentioned the constraints as below:

a. Absence of direct supervision from any specific department (either government or non-government organisation);

b. The Upazila deal with other assignments which, to them, have more priority than the RMP.

One UNO said that she always remains too busy with other administrative affairs which, she feels, are more important than the RMP. She added that she never even goes for an inauguration ceremony as, she thinks, that is a waste of time. She doesn't arrange any meetings on the RMP, but does regularly send reports, deposits funds, and initiates action against any RMP related problem (if noticed by others). She is probably right, as the UNOs are acting as Upazila Chairmen along with their own job. As the Upazila Chairman is an elected and, thus, political position, and it demands an immense amount of time in dealing with the public. Controversially, Rahman and Khan (1997) argue that a large number of civil bureaucrats are unhappy with losing their substantial power to the politicians because of the Upazila reform of Ershad.

The aforesaid example is one type of reality where the UNO is providing adequate administrative support to the RMP but cannot spend his/her own time on it due to other important responsibilities. Besides, UNOs are also found to be unaware about the RMC cell in a considerable proportion of sample. For example, in an interview with a UNO on 02 June 2004, he informed me that no RMC cell had been formed whereas an RMC cell had been formed on 24 April 2004 in that Upazila. Actually, the UNOs, in general, were found not to care about the RMP, which might be due to in fact to a hidden reason that CARE strictly monitors RMP financial leakage. Therefore, none of the counterparts can reap any illegal financial benefit from this project. In every case, RMP was found closed in a file which is maintained by the official secretary of the UNO, and UNOs were helpless without those files while attending this interview.

Coordination Roles:

Support to UP/PMC: The RMC Cell was formed with a view to providing support to the UP/PMC in RMP operation. Most of the respondents agreed that the RMC cell had not provided adequate support to the UP/PMC. Nevertheless, a few sampled Upazilas had been providing support as follows:

a. RMA Selection;
b. PMC-Formation and follow-up;

c. Training;
d. Whenever any support is required from the Chairman/PMC/CARE authority for smooth RMP operation.

None of the respondents said anything about providing problem follow-up support.

Problems to manage UP/PMC: When UNOs were asked whether they face any problem to manage the UP/PMC, there was a mixed response. Those who answered 'yes' noticed the underlying causes:

a. They do not have any formal meeting with UP/PMC;
b. Most communications with the LGD cell are done through CARE i.e. circular distribution, GO-follow up, bank statements, etc.

They mentioned that they, usually, resolve those problems by communicating with the UP chairman and the LGD.

Facts and Recommendations for the Upazila RMC Cell:

- Many of the Cell members do not know about their membership of that Cell. Again, there is much confusion among the UNO, Upazila Engineer and PIO about their roles in the Cell. In the GoB circular on RMC Cell formation the role of the Upazila Cell is given in a very brief account which, actually, does not make any sense. Therefore, the elucidated roles of the Cell should be circulated. For instance, a detailed guideline of the Cell is essential for coordination meetings, field visits, monitoring UP/PMCs, sending crew wages, bank follow-ups, sending reports to LGD, etc. In addition, roles and responsibilities of each individual Cell member should also be mentioned in the guidelines.
- Cell members are not accountable for their roles as no management tool is yet introduced in this regard. The accountability of the Cell as a whole and members in particular should be increased through introducing different management tools.
- It is true that Government officials like the UNO and the Upazila Engineer remain busy with many assignments. This usually keeps them away from helping with RMC Cell functioning; therefore, they could very well tag RMP with other

activities. For example, they can keep RMP as an agenda item in their UDCC meetings or visit RMP roadwork on their way to other assignments.

- According to the Government circular on disciplinary actions against the RMA, PMC and UP, if the UP commits any offence in the subsequent two quarters it will be dropped from RMP intervention. In such a case, RMAs of the same UP are also ultimately punished without committing any mistakes. Thus, the provision of punishment against the UP for any misdeed should be revised so that the RMA members will not be the ultimate sufferer for any action by the Upazila against the UP.
- The LGD RMC Cell is not participating in the RMP monitoring system directly. Therefore, they should revise, and if not available, should develop monitoring and evaluation systems for successful implementation.
- As the UNO and Upazila Engineer are busy with diverse activities, they have less opportunity to participate in RMP activities. If convenient, the key role of the Cell should be shouldered by other Government officials.
- Although the Upazila is supposed to participate in the CS training conducted by CARE, so that they can take over the responsibility of training up UP/PMC in future, they generally do not participate except in inauguration sessions. The Upazilas need to build their capacity so that they can train the UP/PMC for managing the RMP at Union level. In this regard, they may need to be skilled in module development, conduct training, etc.
- The fund management capacity of the Upazila is satisfactory in most cases but, in reality, this demands many follow-up visits by CARE staff. Therefore, the Upazilas have opportunities to be autonomous regarding RMP fund management.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has addressed a cross section of four participating actors: destitute women, local leaders, an NGO and government. Among them the destitute are most vulnerable in the society. Their roadwork all over the Union introduces them to many people and increases their affiliation with and access to different social resources. Consciousness-raising makes them aware of their rights, existing laws and legal support providers. Operating IGAs empower them by giving ownership. Thus, the above services can help women escape the curse of destitution. A decentralised structure of governance can only

promise these services at the doors of community. Of course, in a centrally governed decentralised structure like Bangladesh, the elected local bodies are providing some of the services to the grassroots by considering them their clients. However, these services are the democratic rights of the community.

In my field observation, I realised the extensive need of accountability of the community leaders and the bureaucrats, which can only be obtained through a strong law and order system. The elected UP leaders enjoy control over the community by virtue of their monopolistic control over resources. Again, at the Upazila level, the UNO and his associates do not feel themselves to be accountable to the community as they are not elected; therefore, they remain more loyal to the systems focused on Dhaka, which serve their purposes and favour the UP Chairman. The present crisis of governance derives from such politico-bureaucratic circumstances, which are obstacles to the performance of NGOs. Again, the NGO's nature of 'target accomplishment' and giving less priority to the quality is also responsible to some extent, as exemplified by in the case study of training at the Upazila level.

To give one example of disorganisation, I attended a district level workshop in a DC office. The day before the workshop the DDLG of that office informed me that the meeting would start informally at 12:30 PM, though in the issued invitation the time of meeting that was mentioned was 2:00 PM. The resource persons, and I, from CARE were present at the DC office by 12:00 PM. But the participants arrived at the meeting place at around 2 PM. Again, as the DC was not able to participate in the meeting before 2:00 PM no one was interested in starting it. The DC's participation was only to inaugurate the meeting and added no value to the objective of the meeting. However, the meeting finally started at 3:00 PM; the DC then left the meeting place within 5 minutes and it ended shortly after without extracting the findings in detail. We came to understand that there are protocols among Government officials. If this is the reality, then the RMP will be under threat after the withdrawal of CARE because the flexibility of decision-making, which is essential in any development project, will be gone. This example is not to make any personal attack but to offer some desperately needed criticisms of a system that has taken over the responsibility of the largest development programme in the world.

Chapter Six

Concluding Remarks

INTRODUCTION

"My congressional opponents would not weaken my resolve", US President George W Bush recently said as he robustly defended his new Iraq policy in a television interview (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6261933.stm). Pulok Gupta, in the 'Provati' news of the BBC Bangla on 15 January 2007, said that the declaration came from Mr Bush when the US Congress decided to hold a vote on the criticisms of his new Iraq policy. It is perhaps a political irony that this, the most militarily powerful and interventionist country in the world, has through its dominance of international financial organisations and geopolitical mastery pioneered a global 'decentralisation wave' as a recipe of (neoliberalised) 'democracy'. Of course, 'decentralisation' is a very strong means to bring government closer to the people and, thus, is a functional synonym of 'democracy'. However, if we look back to the discussions on different approaches of decentralisation, we can find both centralised and decentralised forms of decentralisation. For instance, Russian and Chinese local government is fully centralised and works as a part of a central hierarchy. It denotes a link between political philosophy and local government structures in a state. In the case of Bangladesh, political desire is also very important in addition to political philosophy. Chapter Two hinted at a Russia-India backed 'socialist' government in the initial years after independence, which restored the British-inspired and Pakistani-administered centrally controlled local government system. Despite a militarised multi-party democracy for fifteen years and, then, a parliamentary (electoral) democracy since the early 90s, the decentralisation approach has remained remarkably constant. Starting off from the secularist point, every political regime promised to decentralise local institutions, however consolidated and politicised those institutions turned out to be in the long run. Therefore, political philosophy has never been important in shaping the local government institutions of Bangladesh; rather, the political desires of different regimes have been much more important.

Politics, like much else in Bangladesh, has always been characterised by violence and/or corruption. Since independence from Pakistani rule, the nation's first two rulers, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman, were assassinated; between 1974 and 1990 the country was governed largely under a state of emergency and/or marshal law, the aftermath of which was a democratised electoral system but one showing little political progress. This electoral system only applies to general parliamentary elections, which

occur every five years. Whichever party has formed the government has tried to influence elections at the local level. This received mass media coverage during the infamous 'Magura by-election' in 1994 and the 'Dhaka-10' by-election (2004), which the opposition (the Awami League) claimed was a dress rehearsal for the parliamentary elections that were due to be held in January 2007 and which it said would be rigged. Both led to calls for a politically neutral 'caretaker' government to be given responsibility for organising free and fair elections.

This dissertation has been about identifying gaps in the literature on the political geography of local government in Bangladesh. It recognises this gap by providing a historical review of decentralisation. In Bangladesh, decentralisation efforts simply entail bureaucratic changes which crucially lack political will. Though decentralisation bears a sense of bringing government closer to the people, unfortunately, in Bangladesh, decentralisation efforts were instigated by global neoliberal forces, albeit backed by public demand. In the early 1980s, for instance, the new decree of the IMF stipulated that the international community would not address third-world countries' economic problems if their respective governments complied with 'Structural Adjustment Programmes' (Tickell and Peck, 2003). This 'Structural Adjustment' includes austerity measures, high interest rates, cuts in government spending in fields like education and health, the liberalisation of foreign trade and investment and the privatisation of public enterprises. Ershad had to agree to implement an unyielding neoliberal reform programme to gain international support to legitimate his office and, thereby, promulgated the Upazilla centralised local government system (Siddiqui, 1996). Peck and Tickell (2002) explain the politics of neoliberalism as local institutions and actors being given responsibility without power, where the international financial institutions and actors were gaining power without responsibility.

In the same vein of Ershad, the successive political regimes did not put any meaningful effort to design decentralisation plans, other than renaming those institutions. In lieu of that, their power struggle, politicisation and corruption made substantial changes in the local leadership and weakened informal social organisations. All the formal local government institutions, apart from the UP, were bureaucratised and power was given in the form of delegation, whereas, the elected lower tier was made financially dependent on

the bureaucratic elites. On top of that, the lower tiers were used to spread a political base at local level.

Again, there was another issue around the functional hierarchy of civil servants and elected local bodies. I noticed, for example, how the UP Chairman struggles to manage the UP Secretary. Again, Siddiqui (1994, 1996 and 2005) writes about the refusal of UNOs to work under the supervision of politicians. Cultural elements, changing relationships, timing, sequence, mechanisms of participation, partnership and so on were not considered while designing the decentralisation plan; rather it was the means of political gain. Rahman and Khan (1997) argue that Khaleda Zia received substantial support from the civil bureaucrats in the 1991 general election as one of her manifestos was to abolish Ershad's Upazilla system.

Chapter Five explains the state of responsibility and accountability of the civil servants and elected local bodies. Where local government institutions are weak and ineffectual, civil society or informal organisations often emerge to fill the gap. This can be positive, in terms of bridging gaps in service provision and capacity building within communities, or can be negative in terms of allowing the state withdraw from local governance and, in its worst forms, facilitating corruption, gangsterism and so on. The stick and whistle is a good example because it appears to be an emergent civil society organisation, set up to counter poor governance and corruption.

RECENT POLITICAL TURMOIL IN BANGLADESH

Political Power Struggles: Constitution vs Democracy

The call for caretaker government reform in 2006/7 helps to explain the political desires of different political parties in Bangladesh. The need to examine the Election Commission became a burning issue at the beginning of 2006 when it was claimed that the then chief election commissioner, Justice M A Aziz, had published a voter list in which there were around fourteen million false voters. News of false voters was especially common in the national dailies in the period April-June 2006. There was, for instance, found to be a voter list for an area which had disappeared due to river bank erosion. The situation worsened when Justice K M Hasan, former foreign affairs secretary of the BNP, became the first option as chief of the caretaker government as per the

Figure 6.2: Newspaper coverage on the 28 October 2006 protests. From the left The *Daily Ittefaq*: violent protests on different important points of Dhaka city; The Prothom Alo: Mass destruction as a symbol of protest and *The New Age*: A jamaat activist killed by the AL activists.

constitution. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 portray the political violence at the end of October 2006. The situation drew international attention when the video footage of the killing of a political rival was telecasted.

However, finally, President Iajuddin Ahmed assumed the chair of the chief advisor, and so sustained his presidency. Though, Professor Iajuddin, after taking up the new assignment, appointed ten advisors by discussing with the major political parties, he nevertheless failed to prove himself as a neutral person. The President-cum-Chief Advisor experienced the first hurdle when four of his advisors left office accusing him of partiality to a political ally. Until this event, the AL and its allies were enjoying public sympathy as the BNP's invisible influence over the caretaker government was no longer concealed from the public. However, the AL's contentious 'election' accord with an orthodox 'Islamist' party brought them in line with the BNP. The general public could see no difference between these two parties when it became clear that both of them wanted to incorporate Ershad's JP in their coalition, although they had once fought together to overthrow him from the power. The public dissatisfaction with the two major parties was

Figure 6.1: Scenes of mayhem: Activists of the 14- party alliance set fire at various points in the city; riot police swoop on the activists; workers of the 14 party alliance carry off a fellow activist who was shot in head during clashes with Jamaat activists (Source: The *Daily Star* Weekend Magazine, Vol 5, Issue 118, November 03, 2006)

clear in the media. The BBC Bangla organised public discussions, named Bangladesh Sanglap (http://www.bbc.co.uk/bengali/indepth/), in which a substantial majority opinion was against both the BNP and the AL. The struggle between the two rivals became so death-defying that international agencies refused to participate in observing the election, which had previously been announced for 22 January 2007. In such a crisis, President Iajuddin had no option but to declare a 'state of emergency', which brought the army on to the streets, suspended basic rights, muzzled the press and media, and appointed a technocratic caretaker government by handing over the office of the Chief Advisor to Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed.

From the very beginning, the new caretaker government was bold, and at the time of writing (end February 2007) more than twenty political leaders have been imprisoned among fifty blacklisted for corruption (*The Daily Prothom Alo*, 14 February 2007). The judiciary has been separated from the administration department (*The Financial Express*, 16 January 2007), and an independent Anti-corruption Commission has been formed (*The New Nation*, 13 February 2007). The Anti-corruption Commission has already asked for income-expenditure balance sheets from fifty influential political leaders and businessman (*The Malaysia Sun*, 18 February 2007), and some 40,000 low-level gangsters and political thugs have since been detained (*The Economist*, 08 February, 2007). The controvertial Election Commission is to be reformed (*The Daily Star*, O6 February 2007), and so on. The present government have a credible achievement of arresting the political giants who became millionaires within a short time by exploiting their political influence. Within a month, this new 'undemocratic' government has achieved many things which the democratically elected government has failed with over the last fifteen years. *The Economist* published a news story on 08 February 2007 about the present situation of Bangladesh, entitled "everybody but the politicians is happy".

Roll-Back Neoliberalism

This account is not a manifesto for a technocratic government, rather a criticism of the undemocratic practices over the last decade and a half. The present government has some similarity with the previous military regimes as many political leaders were imprisoned accused then of rampant corruption, but now, conversely, the military force is working as a supporting hand to civil bureaucracy unlike in the past. Notwithstanding the initial

success of the 2007 technocratic caretaker government, there are rumours that it is backed by the international agencies. The basis of such conjecture derives from abrupt decision of Mr. Iajuddin to leave the chair of the Chief Advisor and to declare the 'Emergency' immediately after a notice of noncooperation from the international agencies like the European Commission and the United Nations. Strict measures of the interim government against the corrupted politicians of the AL and the BNP and their associates and the coincidental declaration of a new party, the *Nagorik Shokti* (citizen's power), by Professor Yunus has confirmed that rumour in the minds of some. In the editorial of the *Prothom Alo* on 01 March 2007, Dr. Zafor Iqbal hinted at the influence of international force over the interim government; mentioning one of the Advisor's who stressed 'good governance' as a priority and rejecting the chance of elected government soon.

Whatever the hidden facts, there is no doubt that hitherto the accused politicians monopolised the economy and restricted the access of global corporations and/or their ability to survive in this market. Therefore, the anti-corruption activities of the present government will obviously favour the international corporates to enter, compete and survive in this market. This does not rule out the restoration of social and economic justice, rather it emphasises the likely pragmatic link with the 'roll-back' neoliberal idealism about the virtues of instituions building, authoritarianism, free market, openness and global economic integration in the long run.

Patron-Clientism

The previous chapters and the above description of Bangladesh's current political crisis have shed light on a situation of chronic political-gangsterism in central politics, which is also deeprooted at the local level. Local political activists work for their central political patrons, thus enjoying logistical and administrative support to strengthen their control on local resource mobilisation. A substantial number of the rural poor, who live near and below the poverty line, have come to depend on these local political elites for their livelihood security. Hence, the central politicians have a control over the local power structures. Chapters Four and Five discussed the theoretical understanding and empirical evidence of such a patron-client system. It can be argued that if the political corruption has reached such a high level, how can these people be elected by public mandate? How do the AL and the BNP share 80 percent of votes in general elections?

Table 6.1: Security and Development Concerns in Rural Bangladesh (Blair, 2005)

	Main type	Sub type	Progress in the last decade	Potential sources of improvement				
				Patrons	Market	State	Service delivery NGOs	Civil society advocacy
Security Concerns	Destitution	Employment	↑	×	×			
		Food	↑	×	×	×	×	×
		Shelter, Clothing	–	×	×		×	
	Disaster	Environmental (flood, etc.)	↑↑	×		×	×	
		Health (epidemic)	↑			×	×	×
	Crime	Violence, extortion from *mastans*	↓	×				×
		Domestic Violence	–					×
	State	Police (violence, etc)	↓	×				×
		Corruption	↓		×			×
Development Concerns	Agriculture	Growth (inputs, prices, extension etc.)	↑	×	×	×	×	×
		Equity (*khas* land, wages)	–			×		×
	Human resources	Education	↑			×	×	×
		Health (Individual and family)	–			×	×	×
	Family	Gender Issues, dowries	–			×		×
	Infrastructure	Roads, transport	↑			×		×
		Energy	↑			×		×

'Progress' Indicators: '↑' significant improvement; '↑↑'even more improvement; '↓' significant deterioration and '–' little change.

The answer is very simple: first, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, in 2001 less than half of the total population (above 7 years) could sign their name and half of these have reading and writing skills. In addition, being 80 percent rural, a huge proportion of people are not aware about the rampant corruption of the urban-based political leaders. Furthermore, the law and order system of Bangladesh never had

sufficient autonomy to challenge corrupt leaders under the judicial system. Second, a vast majority of people at the bottom economic level rely upon their patrons for survival. For instance, Ershad, the former President of Bangladesh of legendary corruption, and his party had a noteworthy mandate from the greater Rangpur area, his hometown, in the last three general elections. Third, the state has failed to assure the security of its people from violence, extortion, evictions, and so on, hence, people are compelled to obey their patrons. Fourth, in previous times, no other alternative forces could emerge (have emerged) with a different manifesto/image from the existing parties.

Table 6.1 gives a detailed idea of the dependence of the moderately poor and pro-poor groups on different potential sources of support. It is important to mention that the pro-poor and moderately poor depend on their patrons for security concerns, rather than development concerns. The table also depicts an extensive involvement of civil society both in the development and the security concerns. In this regard, we will recap the Stick-Whistle Committee, formally the TERAC, which was introduced in Chapter Four.

Emergence of Civil Society

No drastic action against the mass violence and corruption has so far happened in Bangladesh, which led the country to the top of the world corruption league for five years in a row. Natore, a small town in the North-Western Bangladesh, was no different to other parts of Bangladesh in terms of violence and extortion. While violence and corruption took on an institutional shape all over the country, with killings, rape, hijacking and

Figure 6.3: The Stick-Whistle Committee; Left: From one stick and one whistle to many sticks and many whistles: mass protest against violence; Right: The hijackers caught by the committee (Shaptahik 2000, 25 January 2002)

extortion regular events, with the public administration surrendering to the extortionists, the TERAC decided to protest against gangsters in Natore. The TERAC was an emergent civil society organisation, set up to counter poor governance and corruption. It was informally instigated on November 1999 by Mr Abdus Salam, the then Chairman of the Bangladesh Fertilizer Association, and formally registered on 20 November 2000 as (Registration No. Nat-293), a legal organisation (Shaptahik 2000, 25 January 2002). *The Shaptahik2000*, a national weekly, covered detailed news of the Lathi-Banshi Samity of Natore and its portrait in Gopibag, the worst crime zone of the capital. According to their report, within two years the *samity* captured 50-60 criminals and handed them over to the police. Mr Faruque Ahmed, the then Officer in Charge of *Natore Thana*, told *The Shaptahik2000* that they often fail to arrest the criminals because of legal complexity and political pressure, however, the *samity* helped them to control the law and order system by refusing any political pressure. Mr. Sodor Uddin Ahmed, the then District Commissioner of Natore, said that the *samity* was efficiently working as a substitute for government and, therefore, the government should conduct research on such organisations as examples of best practice that can be introduced all over the country. In the same vein, the then Police Superintendent (SP) of Natore, M Nazrul Islam, saw the *samity* working as a cohort of government. Overall the Stick-Whistle Committee can be seen as a civil society organisation and a corrective at the local level to poor governance. However, there is also the view that the radical potential of civil society organisations is being appropriated and that they are being used to fill gaps in service delivery, allowing the state to withdraw. This view is obviously characteristic of critics of 'roll-back' neoliberalism.

Like many other positive efforts, however, the Stick-Whistle Committee was short lived. On 15 November 2003, the law and order meeting at the DC's conference room, chaired by Deputy Minister for Land Ruhul Kuddus Talukhdar[34], observed that the TERAC activities contradict the law of the land as a number of businessmen gather with sticks to resist criminals (*The Daily Star*, 19 November 2003). A gathering of five or more people with sticks is a crime, the meeting observed. The DC and the SP, who were very positive

[34] Former BNP state minister for land Ruhul Quddus Talukdar Dulu allegedly helped the rise of militant kingpin Siddiqul Islam Bangla Bhai in greater Rajshahi area in 2004, while the ex-minister also raised a gang of criminals led by his cousins and nephews, who terrorised the people of Natore and gradually took over the district's underworld (*The Daily Star*, 05 February 2007).

towards the organisation, could not help. The TERAC received sympathy from different quarters and organised peaceful processions which promised nothing. At length, the Lathi Banshi Shilpa Banik Samity floated under the wing of the minister and he used it to reorganise his party activists[35].

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Different political regimes have formed commissions and reformed local government, however, these decentralisation initiatives have suffered from a lack of genuine political commitment to devolution. The following paragraphs explain how the vicious circle of poverty and central politics have absorbed decentralisation efforts. If we think about Jahanara Begum and Sajeda Khatun, as described in Chapter Four, they will always be loyal to their local patrons (elected bodies) to ameliorate and survive in their non-poor and pro-poor conditions. It is really difficult to break this chain all of a sudden by a policy initiative as the main problem belongs to political aspirations. The last two caretaker governments under Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed and Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed exemplify this point. If we think about different reforms of local government, the gazettes of the *Palli parishad*, *Gram parishad* and *Gram Sarkar* show no major differences in their principles. Then why have opposition parties always protested? Does it only serve the government? Again, the local government commission, formed under different regimes, came up with many recommendations that were nullified at an early stage, on the unspoken grounds that they might obstruct their direct influence at local level. If we conceptualise the decentralisation of Bangladesh, from our understanding in Chapter Three, inadequate thought has been given to the hierarchy of local government tiers and for the most part results have been no more than mere deconcentration. The UP is the only tier that enjoyed administrative and political decentralisation for a length of time, and even here the lack of financial devolution eventually centralised this institution. Although Ershad gave the Upazila adequate administrative and financial devolution, unfortunately, this was another effort to exploit policy within a legal framework. Despite many debates on the need for a Zila Parishad, there has not been a single serious political attempt to decentralise this institution; rather, bureaucrats have practised substantial power by remaining loyal to the sovereign.

[35] http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=7515. Accessed on 06.02.2007.

Restoration of Law and Order System: Finally, this thesis suggests that the restoration of law and order system and assurance of transparency are prerequisites of efficient local government system. In former times, the common people had only the right to vote and the politicians were not accountable to the public. It was possible as a result of a form of negotiation between black-money, gangsterism and extreme poverty. Thus, lawlessness allowed the politicians to enjoy endless freedom and to centralise the local institutions. Without the restoration of law and order, political gangsterism will never be uprooted and the participation of the masses is impossible to attain.

Assurance of Transparency: Advantageously, the present caretaker government is taking bold steps to separate the judiciary from the administration wing, to form an independent Election Commission and Anti-corruption Commission and, thus, is striving to make the political leaders accountable to the public and to depoliticise the national institutions. Ironically, it is not possible to make an abrupt change in the political culture, hence, it is really difficult to speculate whether the next elected government will endorse all the efforts of the interim government or will politicise those institutions as before. In such case, we can think of alternative institutions parallel to parliament.

Social Mobilisation: Again, we cannot provide transparency without ensuring a flow of information by educating the people. Here, 'education' is a means to provide them with institutional education; rather to inform them about their civil rights, help them to access to different service providers, assure their access to resources, educate them to ameliorate their livelihood security and so on. It is very important that they are accessing to services and resources through organised state mechanism rather than from their (political) patrons. It can be a potential way to break the patron-client system. Because of past anarchy, people are not confident of getting justice from the state; again, many people are not even aware of their basic rights that the constitution promises to provide. We can educate them by informing them of their rights and the places to claim those rights. Since it might not immediately be possible for the government to satisfy the needs of all its citizens, they will need cooperation from the NGOs and organisations in civil society. Jahanara Begum, for instance, refused to give dowry in her daughter's marriage as she was informed (in RMP training) about the legal matters around dowry. I came across many RMA women who obtained their rights from their husbands by accessing to legal service providers after being divorced or abandoned. In addition, Graph 5.1 and Table 5.1

(see chapter five) portray a significant average success of RMA women in terms of their monthly income and fixed property.

Delegation of Responsibility: The above paragraph hints at some ideal roles of NGOs and civil societies to accelerate overall development. In Chapter Four and Five, I explained the role of TERAC and CARE in restoring law and order and helping a group of destitute women to attain sustainable livelihood security. On the contrary, the Lathi Banshi Shilpa Banik Samity, which was politicised and reformed from TERAC, established gangsterism within the same community. Again, while conducting the Livelihood Security Survey of the RMP, many respondents informed me that they were cheated by some local NGOs who provide micro credit. However, such kind of incidents can happen if the government fail to provide some efficient regulatory system. It is essential to have a monitoring wing within the governmental system which can handle such issues in liaison with other governmental agencies. Despite some drawbacks, Bangladesh has many successes in immunisation, nutrition, drinking water and sanitation, primary education and so on, which would not have been possible without the help of NGOs. While visiting *Ainer Khop*, *Baher Bali*, and many other *chars*, I noticed no government institutions other than a few NGOs who are providing primary education and primary care services. It is really difficult for a third world government alone to reach every corner of their country with adequate services. Therefore, delegating responsibility for service provision to other quarters like NGOs and civil society can help to address the development concerns of the people.

Considerations of Informal Institutions in Formulation of Decentralisation Plan: As I discussed in the theoretical framework, one of the major considerations in designing decentralisation is to think about the existing cultural elements. Such considerations include the images of a community about regarding the issues of authority, the role of government, the role of the citizen, conflict, consensus, power, the role of elites, the role of elderly lineage, the role of the poor, the role of women, kinship pattern and a host of other issues. In the Chapter Four, I explained about 'samaj' which, broadly, is considered as a unit of our community. Therefore, endorsing such traditional informal institutions, in particular, can reduce the pressure on government in matters such as dispute resolution, social awareness, immunisation, health and safety and so on. Westergaard explains the role of 'samaj' in dispute resolution which is mentioned in previous chapters.

Installation of Democracy: Despite the popularity of the present technocratic government, there is no clue to the dream of a democratised Bangladesh in future. The previous two military governments made promises against corruption, locked up corrupt politicians and, finally, legitimised their own power in collaboration with opportunist politicians from previous governments and 'so-called' civil society. Therefore, it is difficult to speculate about the future of democracy as well as local government of Bangladesh unless the interim government hands over their power to an elected government after a free and fair election.

Capacity Development: Again, the government officials at local level should be made accountable to both the elected bodies and their central hierarchies. In addition, the local bodies need to be capacitised so that they can manage their institutions efficiently. Of course, alongside the government, different national and international agencies can help in capacity building. However, these agencies should be accountable for the output of their activities. Thus, a cross-monitoring system can increase participation and reduce corruption.

Devolution of Power: The most common recommendation for decentralisation is to pursue a policy of devolution. In rural Bangladesh, only the UP has elected bodies though they have extensive dependence on the Upazila for their funds. Instead of developing strong monitoring tools and making the UP bodies accountable, the UP's common properties are administered by the Upazila. A think-tank could perhaps help the government to rethink the number of tiers and delimit their activities. This thesis, suggests the execution of financial devolution along with administrative decentralisation at different tiers.

SUMMARY

The thesis reveals that the principal reason for action in civil society like the TERAC was social insecurity. Promoting such action can be interpreted negatively as a withdrawal of the state or positively as a supporting hand of government. However, as Bangladesh is already characterised by poor governance and will take much longer time to rebuild what has decayed without supporting hands; civil society has an important role to play as a partner to government. This should not be interpreted as the civil society allowing the state to withdraw, rather the spirit of civil society should be focused in helping the

government to accelerate development and/or allow government to focus on other areas where civil society has no scope.

The above discussion suggests the need for further study on a number of questions:

1. How to protect local institutions from central authoritarianism;
2. How to make the leaders more accountable to the public;
3. What should be the mechanism to make the parliament accountable for any decisions when they are in power;
4. How to encourage informal local institutions to support service delivery efforts, and decision-making;
5. What should be the level of involvement of the civil society and informal institutions along with the formal structures;

Notwithstanding its weak local governance, Bangladesh has made noticeable improvements in several sectors such as food production, safety net programmes, rural infrastructure, credit provision, primary education, child inoculation, family planning, drinking water and sanitation (Blair, 2005; Rahman, 2002). While important efforts by NGOs and central government agencies enjoy credit for the above-mentioned achievements, the 'why' of decentralisation comes to the forefront as poverty alleviation is rarely achieved without a successful decentralisation agenda. Rahman (2002) reports that the net rate of poverty alleviation in the 1990s appears to have been stuck at around one percentage point per year, which is depressingly slow. In such circumstances, local government, as a political and institutional process, can enhance developmental choices locally that are more inclusive of all social groups.

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Amar Desh: http://amardeshbd.com/

BBC Bangla Audio and News Archives:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bengali/indepth/story/2005/11/051114_sanglaparchive.shtml

Financial Express: http://www.financialexpress-bd.com/

Jugantor Daily Newspaper: http://jugantor.com/online/day.php?id=419&sys=3

Local Government Division: http://www.lgd.gov.bd/

Local Government Engineering Department, Bangladesh: http://www.lged.gov.bd/

New Age: http://www.newagebd.com/

Prothom Alo: http://www.prothom-alo.org/

Shaptahik 2000: http://www.shaptahik2000.com/

The Bangladesh Observer: http://www.bangladeshobserveronline.com/

The Daily Inqilab: http://www.dailyinqilab.com/

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